DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 262 446 CS 505 086

AUTHOR Yerby, Janet, Ed.
TITLE Research Directions in Family Communication: Proceedings of the Family Communication Research Conference (Evanston, Illinois, September 6-8, 1984).
INSTITUTION Speech Communication Association, Annandale, Va.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 162p.
AVAILABLE FROM Speech Communication Association, 5105 Backlick Rd., Annandale, VA 22003 ($5.00, prepaid).
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Conference Proceedings (021) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Problems; *Communication Research; *Communication Skills; Family Counseling; *Family Relationship; *Interpersonal Communication; Interpersonal Relationship; *Research Methodology; Research Needs; Research Projects

ABSTRACT

In a conference focusing on issues in research methods, family theory, and family therapy as they relate to family communication and on future research needs, this document consists of papers presented by the 12 participants. Specific titles and speakers were as follows: "Kinship Relationships," by Mary Anne Fitzpatrick; "Research Potentials in Family Communication," by L. Edna Rogers; "The Semantics of Family Relationships," by Alan L. Sillars; "Issues of Concern in the Stepfamily," by Pamela J. Cooper; "Family and Work Interaction," by Linda M. Harris, Carol Masheter, and Steve Gavazzi; "Biocultural Evolution in the Family," by Timothy D. Stephen; "Self and Spouse Primary Communication Inventory," by Paul Yelsma; "Family Communication Links to Family Therapy," by Bernard J. Brommel; "Communication and Well-functioning Families," by Kathleen M. Galvin; "Communication and the Practice of Prevention," by Joyce L. Hocker; and "Family Therapy Orientations to Communication and Their Implications for the Study of Family Communication," by Janet Yerby. (EL)

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# Research Directions in Family Communication:

Proceedings of the
Family Communication
Research Conference

Hosted by Northwestern University
September, 1984

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**Janet Yerby, Editor**

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Speech Communication Association

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# RESEARCH DIRECTIONS IN FAMILY COMMUNICATION:

# PROCEEDINGS OF THE FAMILY COMMUNICATION RESEARCH CONFERENCE

Edited by

Janet Yerby
Central Michigan University

With an Introduction by

Kathleen Galvin
Northwestern University

Sponsored Jointly by The Speech Communication Association
Research Board and The Northwestern University School of Speech

Conference Co-ordinators:

Kathleen Galvin, Northwestern University
Pamela Cooper, Northwestern University
Paul Yelsma, Western Michigan University
Janet Yerby, Central Michigan University

Hosted by Northwestern University,
September 6-8, 1984

Publisher: Speech Communication Association
5105 Backlick Road, Annandale, Virginia 22003

1985

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## CONFERENCE OUTLINE

The Family Communication Research Conference was divided into five sessions which were spread over two and a half days. Participants attended all five sessions. Everyone stayed in the Allen Center and shared their meals together in the Conference Center's dining room, so that there was time between sessions to talk.

Sessions I, III, and IV each dealt with an area of family communication research. Each participant prepared a paper for one of these sessions. Papers were ciriculated to all participants before the conference began. Each session operated as a small seminar, led by those participants who had written papers for that particular session. The exception to this format was the presentation by Dwight Conquergood in Session II which took the form of a performance, followed by a discussion which he led. Session V was a discussion session in which the participants identified issues and connections that seemed to emerge from the previous two days of presentations and discussions. The schedule of the conference is given below.

DAY ONE

11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Check-in and Lunch in the Allen Center

1:00 to 5:30 Session I: THEORIES

"What Theories and/or Research Strategies Have the Greatest Potential forResearch in Family Communication?"

Fitzpatrick, Rogers, Sillars

6:00 to 7:30 Dinner in the Allen Center

7:30 to 9:30 Session II: PERFORMANCE

The Transmission of Social and Family Culture through Oral History: "We Never Forget: A Performance of Laotian Refugee Stories"

Conquergood

DAY TWO

8:00 to 9:00 Breakfast in the Allen Center

9:00 to 12:00 Session III: PATTERNS

"What Are Issues of Concern in the Areas of Communication Style, Family Forms, and Patterns?"

Cooper, Harris, Stephen, Yelsma

12:30 to 2:00 Lunch in the Allen Center

2:00 to 5:00 Session IV: THERAPY

"To What Extent Are There Connections Between Family Communication Issues and Those of Family Therapy?"

Brommel, Galvin, Hocker, Yerby

5:30 to 6:30 Cocktails and Reception in the Allen Center

6:30 to 7:30 Dinner in the Allen Center

Open Evening

Day Three

7:30 to 9:00 Breakfast in the Allen Center: Discussion of Teaching Strategies

9:00 to 12:00 Session V: RESEARCH AND REFLECTION

"What Are the Future Research Directions in the Area of Family Communication?"

All participants

12:00 Wrap-Up: "Mud on the Wall"--Sharing What Will Stay with Us as We Leave the Conference

Galvin as facilitator and all participants

# Conference Overview

Kathleen M. Galvin

The 1980's have been called the "decade of the family." Institutions and individuals seem to be rediscovering the family and placing heavy emphasis on the concepts of (1) patterns of normal family functioning, (2) family wellness (in the physical and psychological sense), and (3) the role of communication in the management of developmental and unpredictable family dilemmas. Current family-oriented research across a variety of disciplines reflects a focus on communication patterns. In addition, most of the training programs devoted to wellness and education treat communication as a core concept.

In her introduction to Normal Family Processes, a landmark collection of essays on issues related to well family functioning, Froma Walsh establishes the need for such understanding:

> The need to develop models for family coping and competence is especially urgent at the present time of social and economic upheaval in our society. Questions about the breakdown of the family are raised as families are undergoing transformations in structure, functions, and resources. The stress and confusion accompanying these attempts at adaptation make it at once more difficult and more imperative to identify crucial processes that distinguish well-functioning families. (xiii)

Until the last decade, most family-oriented research focused on problematic or dysfunctional systems. The literature contains countless references to studies of families with schizophrenic members, handicapped members, behaviorally-disordered members. There is an emergent appreciation, however, for the complexity of normal family life and for communication as central to understanding that complexity. Increasingly, the problems of normal families trying to manage status and role relationships, negotiate identities and meanings as members interact, navigate through the history of their collective experience, and validate their collective identity have become compelling concerns.

During the 1970's, a growing number of speech communication scholars turned their attention to family interaction. Convention programs and journals reflect this steady rise in interest. Simultaneously, courses in family communication appeared within speech-communication departments. In 1970, approximately three of four universities offered such a course. Presently, most major speech-communication departments offer a course, or unit within the interpersonal course, in the area of family communication. The family communication field has grown in its appeal as researchers view the family as a critical area of study.

There had been little opportunity for those interested in topics which fall under the general rubric of family communication to interact in a sustained and systematic manner. We would meet at conventions, exchange a few words, listen to each other's papers and bemoan our inability to talk at length. Finally, motivated by the dual forces of frustration and opportunity, a small group of us committed ourselves to planning an opportunity for sustained interaction.

We believed that the time was ripe to bring together a limited number of persons interested in family communication for the purposes of: (1) exploring conceptions of the field, (2) examining methodological approaches, and (3) planning future joint research efforts. Thus, we proposed a conference which would focus on the study of communication patterns in functional families.

We articulated the following rationale for the conference:

1. The process of theory building in family communication will be facilited by identifying the similarities and diversities in current family communication research and teaching.
2. A network will be created for those interested in developing links among typically individualistic research orientations.
3. Certain participants will engage in joint research utilizing different methodologies with the same data.

4. Participants will develop a program for the 1985 CSSA and SCA conferences presenting insights gained from the Northwestern conference.
5. Participants will develop a series of papers reflective of the discussions which could be published individually or collectively.

The SCA Research Board provided its support and start up funds. Northwestern University's School of Speech Alumni Fund underwrote the participant's expenses. Four persons planned the conference: Kathleen M. Galvin and Pamela Cooper, Northwestern University; Paul Yelsma, Western Michigan University; and Janet Yerby, Central Michigan University.

On September 6, 1985, twelve persons convened at Northwestern's Allen Center for the conference. In addition to the planners, the participants included: Bernard Brommel, Northeastern Illinois University; Dwight Conquergood, Northwestern University; Mary Anne Fitzpatrick, University of Wisconsin; Linda Harris, University of Connecticut; Joyce Hocker, University of Montana; L. Edna Rogers, Cleveland State University; Allen Sillars, Ohio State University; and Timothy Stephen, West Virginia University.

Each participant submitted a paper addressing one of the following questions: What theories and/or research strategies have the greatest potential for research in family communication? What are issues of concern in the areas of communication style, family forms and family patterns? To what extent are there connections between family communication and family therapy? These papers, circulated before the conference, served as the stimulus point for each session.

In terms of theories/research concerns, discussion focused on relational typologies, thematic analysis of marital communication and exploring behavioral patterns of family relationships. Issues discussed in the area of family form included a biosocial model of the transmission of communication style from parents to children, redesigning the "Self and Spouse Primary Communication Inventory," research directions in the stepfamily, and the interrelationship

between the family and work. The final concerns of the conference were the identification of major orientations toward communication in family therapy literature, discussion of "normal" communication across family forms, the role of communication professionals in the emerging field of the prevention of family dysfunction and suggestions for research needed to link communication and family therapy.

Dwight Conquergood presented an evening session entitled "We Never Forget: A Performance of Loatian Refugee Stories." The performance was followed by a discussion of Conquergood's ethnographic studies of Asian refugee families in Chicago. At a breakfast session, resources and strategies for teaching a course in family communication were discussed. The conference concluded with a general session on directions for future research in family communication.

This conference provided a setting for the participants to explore issues in research methods, family theory, and family therapy as they relate to family communication and to examine the research needs of the future. It is a luxury for academics from diverse geographic areas to spend time together sharing ideas and beliefs. The planning committee is grateful to the SCA Research Board and the School of Speech Alumni Fund, Northwestern University, for making this time possible. The possible outcomes are moving into reality.

# FOREWORD

Janet Yerby

As the Conference Outline indicates, the Family Communication Research Conference focused on three major topics: (1) theories and research strategies, (2) communication patterns in families, and (3) the relationship of family therapy to family communication. Rather than being given any particular parameters for their presentations, participants were encouraged to make their own choices about what approach they wanted to take in their papers and what form their presentations should take. The decision to make the conference as open-ended as possible turned out to be remarkably successful. It resulted in a set of products which represent a variety of approaches to discussing issues and exploring topics of interest in the area of family communication. We did not leave the conference with any consensus about what "needs to be done" or what perspectives have the "most utility" for exploring specific problems. Instead, the dialogue we had was about potentialities--potentialities in terms of models and theories to use in thinking about family communication research, problems to be investigated, and methodologies that might be useful in exploring those problems. The papers represented in each of the sessions were not intended to provide definitative investigations of the topic but, instead, gave each participant a starting place for sharing what he or she thought was important, useful, or interesting.

The first paper in this collection is written by Mary Anne Fitzpatrick and, in a sense, provides a grounding for the articles that follow. The paper discusses significant historical issues relevant to current views of the post industrial family and offers a model for conceptualizing the relationship of communication research to the field of marriage and family studies. Any social science rsearch is undertaken within a framework of some basic assumptions grounded in the historical context of the work. In her examination of the cultural forces impinging upon the family, Fitzpatrick discusses three myths about the historical reality of the family. The image of the pre-industrial age family as living harmoniously in large extended family groups, the notion that industrialization broke up close kinship ties in the family as people migrated to the cities, and the assumption that pre-industrial families were loving traditional groups oriented toward promoting cooperation are myths that have distorted our understanding of the conditions of the family in contemporary society. In contrast to these myths about the family, the paper discusses three twentieth century

changes in the role of the family in society, focusing on the shift from the social and economic role of the family to its increased psychological and symbolic significance for the culture. Fitzpatrick argues that it is with the rise of the relative autonomy of the nuclear family that communication in families has become significant for theories about families, as well as for families themselves.

The second major thesis of the Fitzpatrick article makes the case for viewing communication as central to current sociological and psychological theories of the family. The paper outlines conceptual frameworks for the study of marriage and the family that have dominated the field in the sixties and seventies. A model is then described for organizing variables relevant to the field of marriage and family studies, identifying three sets of variables: (1) determinants emerging from the historical and environmental conditions in which families find themselves (e.g. formal affiliations, social class, etc.), (2) contingencies or process variables related to the internal structure and performance dimensions of the family (e.g. role structures, behavior patterns, etc.), and (3) consequents achieved as an outcome of various family performances, such as satisfaction, stability, and functioning measures. Fitzpatrick describes the centrality of communication in the model by arguing that "communication is not an artifact but a link among internal, performance, and outcome variables of family life." For those interested in family communication research, this paper documents two important assertions about the study of family communication: Communication researchers need to be informed about the historical and cultural forces impinging upon the family for our research to have meaning. Conversely, theories of the family that ignore the centrality of communication in predicting family outcomes may inadequately represent contemporary family life.

One of the methodological issues in undertaking family communication research that is probably not different from undertaking communication research in other contexts is the problem of when it is useful to focus on individual perceptions versus observable behaviors and to what extent individual versus dyadic data can be conceived of as useful in providing us with information about patterns of communication in marriages in families. We teach skills to our students and in community workshops, for example, and yet skills are prescriptions for specific individual behaviors that often fail to capture the complex nature of communication as behavior that is evoked in the creation of relationship.

It is this issue that Edna Rogers addresses in her paper by discussing the importance of attending to the appropriateness of the methodology for the problem under investigation as a central issue of concern in family communication research. Rogers suggests that research that attempts to analyze transactional patterns in families requires the indexing of observable interactional behaviors as they occur in sequence over time and attending to descriptions which apply to the relationship level

of analysis rather than to individuals. Rogers makes the point that we still have far to go in describing and understanding how individuals organize their relationship and "move toward and away from one another on various relational dimensions".

In discussing the need to move toward greater understanding of how people create and function in relationships, Rogers describes three metaphors that both provide a way of framing research in relational communication and capture the sense of relationship as mutual creation between people in a system: the distancing metaphor, the musical score, and the dance image. Rogers articulates for us that sense of what it is like to focus on the nature of the relationship rather than on the individual in her imaging of how a couple might move around a dance floor--stumbling clumsily, gliding sensuously, standing far apart, stepping on each other's toes, and so on. This paper articulates the need for identifying potential metaphors and research methodologies that will provide us with information at the relationship level, rather than the individual level, of the system.

In his article, Alan Sillars expresses an interest in the "subjective social reality of families." In their daily conversations with one another, families define who they are, how they view the world, and the nature of their relationships in their talk. Sillars dicusses the ways in which the thematic content of conversation--for example, what people talk about, and the attitudes, beliefs and values they express--can help to reveal a family's perception of social reality. In the research he has undertaken, Sillars has developed a classification scheme for coding content themes in marital conversation. Three categories of themes are identified: (1) companionate themes which reflect negotiated patterns in the couples relationship, (2) individual themes which have to do with the separate identities and roles of the individuals in the relationship and (3) impersonal themes which deal with perceptions of "the nature of things".

In describing the importance of information about conversational themes for understanding relationships, Sillars identifies several potential research goals related to analysis of the thematic content of a couples' conversation. To what extent, for instance, may recurrent conversational themes discriminate among different types of marriages? Do more compatible couples reveal a greater cohesiveness in the themes expressed in their conversation or is there a relationship between content themes and conflict styles? Hess and Handel (1959) were among the early investigators to suggest the importance of "family themes" in helping the observer to understand the unique culture of a specific family. Sillars' paper provides us with a framework for examing family themes as they are revealed through the family's communication (i.e. conversation).

Because of the variety of models currently available for

"being a family", there is a growing interest in providing information that will be useful in understanding and helping particular kinds of families (e.g. single-parent famlies, divorced families, blended families, etc.). In her paper, Pamela Cooper examines communication variables relevant to understanding, researching, and helping stepfamilies. The first part of the paper presents an overview of several common "issues" in stepfamilies that are discussed in the literature: divided loyalties, jealousy, problems of discipline, unrealistic expectations, definition and clarification of roles, and myths of instant love and the "wicked stepmother".

A significant portion of the literature written about stepfamilies that explores these issues reinforces the important mediating role that effective communication performs. Cooper points out, however, that because most of this literature is written by professionals, it is primarily oriented toward offering advice and making suggestions for those who are coping with the problems of being a stepfamily. This article underscores the need for research-based data that analyzes communication patterns in stepfamilies and compares the effectiveness of alternative communication training programs aimed at stepfamilies. Potential areas for research are included in the discussion, among them studies which take a systems perspective toward the family, observational studies as well as self-report studies, longitudinal studies that investigate developmental stages, decision-making, stages in relationship development, types of conflict, self-disclosure, power, roles, boundaries, images, themes, networks, various forms of stepfamilies and adjustment. While this paper focuses specifically on the problems of stepfamilies, it does indicate the significant paucity of research and the need for research that examines communication patterns as they vary among many diverse alternative family forms.

Researchers in family communication have tended to focus on relational or interpersonal issues in marriages and families. Linda Harris, in her paper, analyzes, instead, the politics of the interface between the family and the work place. She is interested in the dynamics between the family system and the larger eco-system, specifically the work institutions with which family members are affiliated. Offering a model from which to examine the influence of institutional interactions where people work upon internal family dynamics, her concern is with the stress upon the family that results from the failure of work institutions to adapt to the needs of the family.

Harris makes a strong case for characterizing the relationship between family and work systems as estranged, with families and work institutions inhabiting two different worlds and functioning, in some cases, with adversarial goals. The paper develops the argument that the family in its relationship to the institution bears the greater responsibility for adjustment. Significant stresses upon the family result from its need to bear the greater burden for adjustment to the demands of work

institutions. The nature of these stresses is examined through three typical scenarios: the transfer of one member of a dual-career couple, time management problems, and the need to defer nurturing and child rearing priorities to work demands. The argument for addressing the problems created by the lack of reciprocity in the family-work relationship is forcefully and compellingly developed in this paper.

Much that we have come to understand about caring for our health and our emotional lives stems from an awareness of the interactive nature of cognitive, social, and biological influences on behavior. Little work has been done, however, to consider the utility of applying bio-evolutionary concepts to the study of family interaction. Timothy Stephen, in his article, reviews the contributions which the evolutionary and genetic biologists can make toward our understanding of family communication. He presents a model which includes an examination of the genetic orgins, as well as the social influences, on the transmission of communication patterns in the family. It is the interactive nature of biological and cultural evolution, however, which Stephen maintains deserves specific recognition. He suggests that an integration and awareness of the interactive nature of socio-biological concepts can help us to avoid a scientific dualism in our study of the family where we segregate analyses of biological stages of development from social and interpersonal influences on behavior. Such awareness may be especially useful in helping us to understand the transmission of specific family communication variables such as communication competence or conflict style across generations.

Rather than suggesting a general theoretical framework for structuring how we think about family communication patterns, Paul Yelsma's article outlines a specific research project he is undertaking. The paper examines the communication practices of couples, focusing on differences between members' cognitions of what they observe about one another. Yelsma presents and discusses his revised version of Navran's Primary Communication Inventory, a measure for describing a couple's perceptions of their communication practices, for assessing communication ability based on the couple's self- and spouse-reports of their communication, and for identifying perceptual agreement about communication behavior. The article outlines a program of research intended to investigate the extent to which the instrument can be used as an effective measure to discriminate, for instance, between "happy" and "unhappy" couples. Yelsma's paper may be especially useful as a tool for introducing students and practitioners to self- and spouse-report methods of collecting data about effective family communication practices.

The last group of papers focuses on the relationship between family communication and family therapy. Bernard Brommel's paper identifies the major link between family communication and family therapy in a fundamental way by offering a definition of therapy that is, in fact, communication-based, asserting that: "Therapy becomes necessary or at least advantageous when communication

fails to link one member in meaningful ways to others in the family system." In his discussion of the relationship of family therapy to family communication, Brommel points out the significance of communication issues in the therapy process. The therapy literature, however, contains many assumptions and generalizations about communication that are yet to be tested. Brommel maintains that much of the advice about effective communication and family interaction processes discussed in the therapy literature might have greater value were important communication variables controlled and measured. He then identifies specific issues where family communication research could be useful to the therapist. There is considerable need, for instance, for more research in family conflict and the management of family roles, especially the role of the father in the family. Family of origin issues and their relevance to communication processes in the family also need investigating, as well as the relationship of family communication to the influences of the environment (e.g. unemployment, social support systems, work institutions, etc.). How communication changes as families move through various developmental stages also needs to be documented. Certainly research in family communication that provides data relevant to the problems of therapists has the potential to have real impact on the perceptions and practices of family therapy.

In her discussion of the relationship of family communication to family therapy, Kathleen Galvin focuses on the need for research that examines communication in well functioning families and across family forms. Because research in the family therapy literature has historically concentrated on psychopathology, only limited research is available which provides data about the communication patterns of normal or well functioning families. There is a particular need to examine such issues as the influence of ethnicity on family communication. In addition, little research has been undertaken, as Brommel also indicated, that allows us to draw reasonable conclusions about the influences of the family of origin on communication patterns in the family. What family communication patterns are transmitted across generations, for instance, and how do their transmission influence the behaivor of new family systems?

Congruent with her concern for research that provides more data about communication patterns in well functioning families, Galvin makes a case for increasing efforts to evaluate the role of communication instruction in the prevention of family dysfunction. Few comprehensive studies are available which effectively assess, for example, the effects of marital enrichment programs. The article also addresses the need for exposure of communication research in the family therapy literature. Communication is consistently discussed in the family therapy literature as central to the family's functioning. Work needs to be done, however, to heighten the awareness of family therapy researchers to theory and research in the communication field. Finally, Galvin discusses the potential of qualitative and rhetorical methodological approaches to family

communication research. There is much that could be revealed about a family's culture and its relationship to communication processes in the famiy through examination of such constructs as family images, metaphors, content themes, and shared paradigms.

The need for more research that focuses on the functioning of normal families, explores the potential of qualitative studies for describing different normal patterns of family interaaction, and reinforces the the role of communication in helping families in various states of therapeutic problem-solving is also addressed in the paper written by Joyce Hocker. This article discusses the urgency of the need for increased involvement of the communication discipline in the area of prevention of family dysfunction, identifies research directions aimed at supporting prevention activities, and describes some practical concerns related to increasing our role in this area.

Hocker describes a wide variety of helping contexts where communication professionals can apply their skills by offering communication training courses to students and professionals in mental health fields, participating as members of a professional mental health teams, functioning as guest consultants in the practice of therapy, providing in-service training programs and workshops, working with foster family agencies, and functioning as divorce mediation consultants. Consulting activities and applied research in our discipline bring with them the satisfaction of identifying the specific needs of a social unit and engaging in activities that will impact in some positive way upon the lives of those in the system. In her discussion of communication and the practice of prevention, Hocker outlines some useful strategies for how we might, as a discipline, become more directly involved in improving the health and well-being of families.

There are a wide variety of models available to the family therapist, each of which tends to view communication differently. Behavioralists, for instance, tend to take a skills approach toward communication, focusing on methods of reinforcing more functional communication behaviors in families. Pragmatic and structural therapists, however, examine communication as a more complex relationship-defining process and are less interested in facilitating individual communication skills of members than in changing the rules and patterns which govern the family system. In the final paper in this collection, I review alternative approaches toward communication as they are represented in the family therapy literature and identify potential areas of research in family communication suggested by the various perspectives. Five orientations to communication that can be identified in various schools of family therapy are discussed, including the skills orientation, the pragmatic or strategic view, the structural approach, the family typology appraoch, and the insight approach. Differentiating among approaches to comunication as they are represented in the family therapy literature offers another path toward organizing and integrating research and study in the area.

The variety of approaches represented by the papers in this collection is one of the primary strengths of this volume. Some papers lay out specific research projects and include instruments intended to generate data relevant to the specific variables described. Several papers describe potential areas for research in a particular area of family communication. Others attempt to define significant social problems that are related to the study of families and family communication and provide suggestions for generating information which can lead toward their resolution. Reviews of the literature, perspectives for framing how one thinks about family communication, and suggestions for applying what we discover and what we do in communication so that it will have positive social impact are also represented in these papers. The collection of papers represented in this volume will not provide any integrating model of family communication nor will they summarize all the major research studies and literature that might be considered as part of the "cutting edge" of the area. These papers do provide, however, a sense of the richness and importance of family communication as a field of investigation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS


**Theories**

Kinship Relationships ..... 1
Mary Anne Fitzpatrick

Research Potentials in Family Communication ..... 15
L. Edna Rogers

The Semantics of Family Relationships ..... 24
Alan L. Sillars

**Patterns**

Issues of Concern in the Stepfamily ..... 33
Pamela J. Cooper

Family and Work Interaction: A Macroanalysis of Family Communication ..... 45
Linda M. Harris, Carol Masheter, and Steve Gavazzi

Bio-Cultural Evolution in the Family ..... 60
Timothy D. Stephen

Self and Spouse Primary Communication Inventory: A Measure of Perceptual Congruency ..... 78
Paul Yelsma

**Therapy**

Family Communication Links to Family Therapy ..... 95
Bernard J. Brommel

Communication and Well Functioning Families ..... 102
Kathleen M. Galvin

Communication and the Practice of Prevention ..... 115
Joyce L. Hocker

Family Therapy Orientations to Communication And Their Implications for the Study of Family Communication ..... 130
Janet Yerby

# KINSHIP RELATIONSHIPS

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prepared for
The Proceedings of the Northwestern University
Conference on Families
September, 1984

KINSHIP RELATIONSHIPS

As early as four million years ago, males and females had begun to bond, to share and to work together (Fisher, 1983). From these early simple dyads, more elaborated kinship structures gradually evolved. In traditional societies, kinship structures are the social structure, although the forms that kinship takes can vary enormously. In our current society, kinship is of greatly reduced significance in holding the social order together. Kinship has become for many a matter of choice rather than a matter of fact (Shorter, 1976). As kinship has lost its social and economic significance, however, it has increased in psychological and symbolic significance (Gadlin, 1977).

Across the social sciences, any consideration of kinship, marriage and the family stands as an almost inseparable trinity. As with any set of important concepts, the definitions of these

terms and their interrelationships are frequently debated. Basically, each of the definitions of these important terms makes reference to social relationships, their behavioral content, and the regulatory power of norms expressed in terms of rights and duties (Verdon, 1981). While kinship involves a biological reckoning, it is the social definition of who belongs to whom and who is related to whom that carries the most weight (Reiss, 1971). The tie of kinship is a special tie in every society of which we have records.

In this paper, I first cover some of the historical myths that have clouded our views of the nature of the current post industrial family. Secondly, I try to demonstrate rather than merely assert the centrality of communication in any theoretical or conceptual discussion of the family.

## THE MYTHS VERSUS THE HISTORICAL REALITY OF FAMILY LIFE

It is the thesis of this section that nostalgia for a lost family tradition that, in fact, never existed has prejudiced

our understanding of the conditions of families in contemporary societies. This lack of understanding of historical reality effects the development of systematic theorizing about the family in the modern society. There are three myths that strike me as particularly problematic.

Myth 1: Families consisted of large three generational groups who lived in peace and harmony with one another.

Theoretical and empirical discussions of communication and the aging often imply that in the good old days, family elders were taken into large households where they held positions of respect and honor. The large household bursting with kin and linked emotionally, physically and economically to other households was, in fact, never the prevailing family form in North America or Western Europe (Rosen, 1982). Households actually contained the nuclear family of mother, father and children. More often than not, strangers were taken into these households as boarders to increase the family income. Such households discouraged intimacy as the majority of family



2.1

interactions were subject to the scrutiny of "outsiders."

Myth 2: Industrialization broke up close kinship ties as more and more individuals moved to urban areas.

Actually, kinship ties and the exchange of help and services which these ties so often specify remained in the city. Workers moving to the city would often live with kin. Chain migration of whole families was quite common. Industrialization may even have forced individuals to rely even more heavily on kin for assistance. Kinship ties remain vigorous in industrial societies (Bert, 1970).

Myth 3: Families were warm and loving traditional groups united by common goals and the desire to promote the best interests of the group.

In Western Europe before the beginning of the nineteenth century, traditional families could best be described as emotional icebergs. Such families were marked by a massive indifference to infant life (Shorter, 1975) that is better described as neglectful than brutal. Young infants were alone

for long periods of time, and were in rocked in cradles so violently that they were knocked unconscious. Parents expressed little bereavement at the death of their child. Infants were sent to wet nurses soon after birth and over 30% of those children died in nursing. Not only were the parent child relationships less than warm by our standards but the marital relationship seems to have been marked by indifference, hostility or withdrawal (Shorter, 1975).

A number of changes have occurred in the twentieth century nuclear family which have significance for the study of interpersonal communication in families. The first significant change is the rise of the cult of domesticity. Domesticity implies the family's awareness of itself as a precious emotional unit that must be protected from outside intrusion. Such withdrawal from the larger society places strains not only on the family but also on community life in general (Slater, 1963). The family becomes the major emotional center of one's life and this centering brings with it demands for more and more self disclosure and openness.

The second significant change is an ideological one. There has been a change from a collective view to one of individualism and sentiment. Such a view promotes the values of individualism and autonomy over the importance of group cooperation and interdependence. While the general culture supports such ideological orientations toward autonomy, individuals and couples differ as to their supportiveness toward such values (Fitzpatrick, 1984). And, these ideological views predict how couples communicate with one another.

The third significant change occurs in the timing of family transitions. One of the most interesting family related consequences of the increase in life expectancy is the emergence of the four generation family. One half of all persons aged sixty five and older have great grandchildren. There is a generational crunch with grandparents having obligations to both sides. The increase in the potential pool of kin may radically alter the range and types of communicative exchanges that individuals engage in with family members.

The nature and role of communication in kinship structures has varied historically in Western culture. A consideration of historical factors sets the scope conditions for our theoretical efforts by reminding us of the limitations of our empirical generalizations. It is with the rise of the nuclear family and its divorce from the larger community that communication in families has achieved prominence not only for families themselves but also for theories of the family. The major function left to the modern family is the protection and nurturance of its members. This function is primarily accomplished through communication. In the next section, we show how central communication is to current sociological and psychological theories of the family in twentieth century society.

## THE CENTRALITY OF COMMUNICATION IN THEORIES OF THE FAMILY

During the sixties, three conceptual frameworks dominated the study of marriage and the family: the structural-function, the interactional and the developmental (Nye and Berardo, 1981).

During the seventies, greater theoretical emphasis has been placed on conflict theories (Sprey, 1979); exchange theories (Nye, 1979); and systems theories (Burr, Leigh, Day and Constantine, 1979). Regardless of the meta-theoretical perspective taken by the theorist, the concept of communication is necessary in any attempt to explain, predict or understand family outcomes. I start by isolating the major variables included in all of these dominant perspectives and then show how these variables relate to communication in the family.

Across all these theoretical perspectives, a basic set of determinants, contingencies and consequents of family life has been extracted (Hill, 1979). The most extreme determinants of family behavior are those that deal with the complexity, uncertainty, constraints and facilitations of the environment in which a kin group finds itself. From these aspects of the environment emerge seven important factors discussed by theorists: value orientations; access to information; economic resources; formal affiliations; helping systems; social networks; and social class.

As I have argued in the previous section, our theories of the family are enriched by considering the historical and environmental conditions in which families find themselves.

The contingencies of family theories are those endogeneous variables that describe family internal and performance variables. The internal variables of the family include the power and role structures that define the family and the affection and support structures, while the performance variables include the overt behavioral activities of the family such as marrying, child socializing and tension managing. It is in these classes of variables that communication is directly implicated. Often verbal and nonverbal messages are used to define operationally the internal variables. Furthermore, many of the overt behavioral activities of family life are performed by symbolic exchanges.

The sequents of family life include the outcomes that are achieved as a consequence of the operation of various family performances. The major family outcomes variables are satisfaction, stability and functioning measures. Satisfaction measures

an individual's subjectively experienced happiness with the family or the marriage while stability is concerned with whether or not the family (marriage) is intact. Family functioning is a multi-dimensional construct defined in three major ways. First, does the family accomplish its goals? Second, does the organization of the family violate societal principles? Third, does the family contain a diseased member? There are a number of value orientations underlying the decisions that a theorist makes concerning what constitutes a "correct" answer to these outcome measures are the value judgments of the theorist. Let the reader beware.

A focus on communication helps to clarify why different internal family variables lead to the same outcomes (and vice versa). There are at least three senses in which communication can be conceptually related to the internal and performance variables of family theories and hence to family outcomes of interest. First, communication can be construed as the underlying causal mechanism that translates the set of internal variables through overt behavioral display into selected

outcomes. This assigns a strong role to communication in the family as it becomes the mechanism through which various family outcomes are achieved. Levinson and Gottman (1984) have a theory which states that the message behaviors of a spouse can cause high degrees of physiological arousal which in turn leads to increased dissatisfaction with the marriage. Message behavior exerts a strong causal force on this process.

Second, communication can be seen as the intervening variable between the internal and performance processes. This is a weakened form of the above role for communication in which the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages is seen as missing from the list of major family performance variables. The message behaviors are said to intervene between the internal variables and the outcomes achieved by the family.

Third, communication may fit into this scheme because the verbal and nonverbal exchange of messages is constitutive in that it produces and reproduces the social structure of marriage and the family. Such a view sees communication as dialectical in

that family members both sustain and create their kin relationships to one another through communication (Giddens, 1984).

Regardless of the meta-theoretical orientation taken by the theorist, the specification of the connection between the internal, performance and outcome variables is incomplete without the explication of the nature and function of communication.

## CONCLUSION

I have argued that many theories of the family have ignored the centrality of communication among family members in predicting family outcomes. Our work has been uninformed by aconsideration of the historical and cultural forces impinging on the family. Furthermore, in explaining internal family dynamics communication is viewed as an artifact rather than a construct of serious import. I tried to show that communication may be considered as the link among the internal, performance and outcome variables of family life.

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# RESEARCH POTENTIALS IN FAMILY COMMUNICATION

by

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Paper presented at the SCA/Northwestern University Research Conference on Family Communication, Evanston, Illinois.

September 1984

The Questions We Ask

As we ponder the question framing this conference, "What strategies have the greatest potential in family communication research," we must recognize that the potential of any strategy depends in large part on the questions of interest. Such recognition underscores the critical link between the research problem and the approach selected; it stresses that the questions we ask, guide the potentiality of the approach we take.

Thus, I see our task, not to debate in the abstract which strategies or perspectives hold the most potential, but to clarify and sort-out which approaches hold what type and degree of potential in which research contexts. Our progress in researching, understanding and diagnosing family dynamics rests on our ability to clearly recognize the epistemological differences of different approaches and thus apply these strategies wisely.

To not recognize our basic and operative assumptions is far more limiting, than to recognize their limitations. A few "classic" misalignments from the study of the family serve to demonstrate the commonality of this basic problem. A not infrequent procedure utilized in the past was to obtain data of the husband's view of marriage or family issues, decision-making, etc., by asking his wife. Safilious-Rothchild (1969) emphasized this blatant mismatching by her declaration that the bulk of "family" sociology is not such, but that it is wife sociology. At the same time, when both spouses were asked for their description of similar or joint events (e.g., the adoption of household innovations, rearing of children, their styles of discipline, time spent talking with one another) researchers fretted over the lack of consensus in the descriptions. In "His and Her Marriage," Barnard (1972) was seemingly more comfortable with the idea of multiple realities. Other

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examples that are commonplace in the family literature are studies of parent-child, husband-wife interaction, based on individual measures, process studies based on nontemporal data. Many disappointing results stem from inappropriate beginnings.

To reemphasize the issue, the procedure of asking wives to describe their husband's views of marriage provides valuable data of the wives' perceptions, but not of their husbands'. Monadic measures have enormous utility, but not as measures of relational phenomena. Different strategies have different sets of advantages and limitations. To the extent that conceptual and measurement confusions are reduced, advances in family communication research can proceed.

Thus, a strategy that holds potential for all of us, no matter which particular perspective(s) we identify with, is the clarification of differing paradigmatic epistemologies to increase our awareness of comparative strengths and weaknesses of our research options. One cannot not have an epistemology and to claim such, as Bateson pointed out, is to have nothing but a bad epistemology.

This first suggestion for increasing our research impact is somewhat global and perhaps could be labeled a meta-strategy. The following suggestions center on the need to expand a systems-based, communication approach to the study of family dynamics. I am guessing that this comes as no surprise to any one.

## The Social Drama of Small Events

Weick's phrase the "drama of small events" describes a research arena where I think worthwhile questions about interpersonal and family relations await answers. These questions focus on the process of interrelating, i.e., communicative processes. Communication is the life-giving sustenance of relationships, the linking process through which we shape and play out our

relational lives. The degree of connectedness and separateness, definitions of self and other, the collaboration of pattern, the negotiated nature of relationships become focal points of concern with this research emphasis.

Social drama resides in the reciprocal, joint effects of interactants' behaviors in conjunction with one another. Individual actors choose which behaviors they will enact; relational dynamics, however, can only be constrained, not individually dictated. Interpersonal relationships are inherently fragile and our membership "dues" are paid in degrees of vulnerability.

The richness of these and other communication based processes have too infrequently been given attention in the study of social dynamics. They have typically been dubbed as intervening variables, sandwiched between psychologically-based independent-dependent variables. The incongruency of studying social interaction via intrapsychic models has long stood as an academic wonder to me.

Further, and in line with my earlier suggestion of the value of examining basic assumptive alignments, there appears to be an underlying "given" in much of the interpersonal and family research that interpretive meaning is more valid, more explanatory than behavioral meaning, i.e., that what people say they mean is more meaningful than what people do. But since people can say they mean a variety of meanings without meaning them, while they can only do what they do, on what basis is this meaning more meaningful? The explanatory nature of the two approaches is different, not "more than." The strategy that holds greater potential is to develop both the interpretive-cognitive approach and the behavioral-pragmatic approach, in order to gain from their complementary and contrasting aspects.

In understanding the dynamics of interaction, the study of both the cognitive processes and the behavioral processes are essential, and in the best

of all worlds, integratable into a more complete model of social and personal relations. At present, however, we are far richer in cognitive measures than in relational measures.

## Indexing Pattern

A challenge for family communication research lies in expanding these measures, in indexing and exploring the behavioral patterns of relationships. Involved in this challenge is a fundamental change of perspectives, from an epistemology of objects to an epistemology of pattern. Descriptions of temporal patterning, what Gottman (1982) refers to as temporal form, necessitate the incorporation of time ordering and a shift from within to between person variables. This change can be visualized as a figure-ground reversal. Traditionally the relationship was "background," with the individuals as "figure"; with an epistemology of pattern, individuals recede into the background as the relationship becomes the figure. The analysis of how interactants organize themselves vis-a-vis one another over time, how they move toward and away from one another on various relational dimensions, becomes the central research focus.

The indexing of temporal form, the recurring patterns that emerge from ongoing message-exchange processes, necessitates a systemic, process-oriented approach. This approach must incorporate a methodology meeting three basic requirements: (1) the indexing of observable, ongoing interactional behaviors, (2) the retention of the sequential and contingent nature of these behaviors, and (3) the identification of system-level structuring. No particular measures or analyses are imposed by these requirements, but they do outline the general methodological characteristics required of what is known as a pragmatic approach. To the extent that these steps are met, the study of process, pattern and context will progressively be expanded.

Each of the methodological steps is a prerequisite for the next. The first step is a necessary, but not sufficient step for a relational analysis. The second requirement insures the inclusion of a minimal element of process and structure. The third step remains the most challenging and most essential in the development of this approach. Until we move beyond the transact level to larger indexings of pattern, the potentiality of this approach remains unfulfilled. Inclusion of contextual aspects of interaction becomes possible with the identification of successively higher levels of temporal form. Other contextual measures, such as the relational typologies developed by Fitzpatrick (1977), are critical in mapping out the constraints of context on relational dynamics; for instance, competitive symmetry may be the juice of life in the "independent" marriage, while in the "traditional," it may be the beginning of the end.

Helpful Metaphors

The above criteria lay out general research strategies necessary to expand our understanding of the processual and cyclic nature of interaction dynamics. For putting these ideas into action, the following three metaphors have been particularly helpful: the distancing image, stemming from earlier work in the family (e.g., Hess and Handel, 1959) but more directly from Kantor and Lehr's work (1975), the musical score and dance images, both suggested by Bateson (1972, 1979) and expanded upon by others.

The distancing image allows a general, but vivid, visualization of movement, of relations in process, of how participants via their communication behavior move towards, away and against one another (to borrow from Horney, 1945). It stresses relational thinking. It is nonsensical, to think of distance being based on one measurement point. The conceptualization necessitates a minimum of two points, and if you accept Kantor and Lehr's conceptualization

of interpersonal systems as primarily information-processing systems and "the information it processes is distance regulation in nature" (1975:222), then a minimum sequence of three movements appears necessary for regulating distance between interactants. One behavior establishes a "point," a second behavior establishes a distance or difference from that "point" and a third behavior references (i.e., regulates) that distance.

For example, an occurrence of conflict is often defined as "active opposition" or "struggle" over incompatible values, goals and resources (Coser, 1956; Simons, 1974). Accordingly, the double-transact of three consecutive one-up control movements (↑↑↑) is a potential index of the minimal distance-regulation nature of conflict. Likewise a triadic unit appears to be the minimal level for indexing decision-making, such that a decision is finalized when an attempt to define the relationship is offered and accepted and the acceptance is accepted (↑↓↓). A negotiation pattern, however, may require a minimum of five movements (↑↔↔↓) where attempts to delimit are elaborated upon before being accepted.

These suggestions are in line with Weick's (1979) proposal that triadic units are necessary for depicting organizing characteristics. In the relational control work it has previously been suggested that two contiguous movements form the minimal base for identifying relational structure, while three consecutive moves constitute the minimum requirement for pattern recognition.

The metaphor of the musical score provides a guide for digitally "composing" the analogical score of communicative exchange processes. It has been the central image in the development of the Relational Control System. Different songs (e.g., love songs, somebody done me wrong songs, campfire songs, marching songs) and different types of music (e.g., jazz, classical, rock, bluegrass) are all recognizable by differing rhythms, ordering of notes, and so on. In a similar way, various rhythms, recurrent themes, intensities of

pitch, and reflexive fugues characterize interpersonal relationships. Note that the same content or lyrics of a song or conversation can be played out in a host of different musical or relational styles and patterns.

The dance metaphor allows the more abstract notions of distancing constraints to be imagined as different dance steps of relational partners, the patterns are the dance created by their combined moves. Some couples move freely and fluidly around what I facetiously call "The Dance Floor of Life," others clutch each other, step on one another, stumble and perhaps fall. Some move with rigid propriety, while others sensually flow in and out of closeness. A rich array of imagined patterns and mixes of patterns emerge from the imagery of this metaphor.

If we have success in being able to identify patterns and map out their impact, it will not only add to the accumulating knowledge about interpersonal and family relations, but it may have ramifications for the "doing" of therapy, the "orchestration" (I haven't quite gotten out of the music motif) of change. Even with moderate success the pragmatic approach could provide a basis for insight into family rules, patterns of collusion, an evaluative base of first and second order change, answers to when one or the other is functional or dysfunctional in the process of ameliorating lethal forms of the tyranny of pattern.

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# The Semantics of Family Relationships

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Suppose that we asked someone who has no prior familiarity with the area to evaluate the family communication literature. Perhaps the first thing this person might realize is that "family communication" doesn't have much to do with what types of things people say or should say, rather, there is a distinct emphasis of style over content. To put it another way, the focus of family communication research is on pragmatics rather than the semantics of conversation. Most of our research is concerned with patterns of affect, dominance, and conflict, as revealed by speech act categories (e.g., question-answer, topic change, personal support or rejection) and nonverbal behavior. There really isn't much precedent for a content or meaning-focused analysis of family communication, although there have been a few rumblings about the importance of family metaphors (Bochner, 1976; Weick, 1971) and some important sociological studies of family themes and images (e.g., Hess & Handel, 1959; Komarovsky, 1962; Bott, 1957).

In this brief paper I examine the direction our research has taken and consider the prospects of a different approach, which might complement the existing focus. In this alternative approach, the thematic content of conversation, for example, what people talk about and what attitudes, beliefs and values they express, would be seen as an important part of "relational communication" (i.e., how family relationships are defined through conversation). Thematic content is of interest mainly because it helps to reveal a family's perception of social reality, for example, their image of what a family is and should be like. A significant part of this image has to do with the role that communication is presumed to play in mediating conflicts, establishing togetherness and so forth. These expectations, in turn, may determine the role that communication actually plays within the family. Later in the paper I have more to say on this subject and I also describe a classification scheme that my associates and I are using to carry out a thematic analysis of marital conversations.

## Prevailing Influences on Family Communication Research

The present emphasis on form or style over message content is probably due in large part to the influence of systems theory on communication and family theories. Systems theory, of course, is concerned with the abstract, formal similarities of living systems, irrespective of their content (animal, vegetable or mineral). Similarly, the applications of systems theory to family communication expressed by the interactional tradition or "Palo Alto group" (see Wilder, 1979) and by behavioral approaches to the family (see Jacobson & Martin, 1976; Gottman, 1982) focus on the formal or structural similarities of family communication systems, such as reciprocity, complementarity and entropy. These perspectives do not attempt to differentiate families on such dimensions as traditionalism or togetherness-separateness, which refer to particular beliefs and values.

The emphasis given to abstract structural characteristics of conversation by the Palo Alto group and others is further based on a theoretical separation of message content and relationship definition. According to Watzlawick,

Beavin and Jackson (1967), all messages have content and relationship levels, with the relational level being metacommunicative, implicit in action and analogic, whereas content meaning is direct, literal and digitally coded. The dicotomy between content and relationship levels has set the state for current research, which is predominantly devoted to what Watzlawick et al. construed as the relationship level of meaning. A further development is that relationship definition is described mostly in behavioral language. This development is also related to the content/relationship dicotomy. Since relationship definition is considered implicit and analogic, it follows that relationship level mening cannot be identified with subjective interpretation, because the perceiver is often unaware of relational cues. Thus, according to Watzlawick and associates, the meaning of an act is indicated by the behavioral sequence in which the act is embedded. Meaning in this sense is not a function of interpretation, although the two phenomena may be correlated (see Millar & Rogers-Millar, 1981). Essentially the same position is taken by behavioral approaches to family communication, which blend systems theory with an emphasis on overt patterns of reinforcement (Gottman, 1982).

Thus, the prevailing theories of family communication have heightened interest in behavioral patterns and sequential structures of conversation, while at the same time contributing to a subdued interest in the subjective social reality of families. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with the research avenues being pursued, the present focus of research seems out of balance. As Wilmot (1980) pointed out, there are important aspects of relationship definition that are given very little attention in our literature, perhaps because of the restrictive view of relational communication conveyed by Watzlawick et al. Whereas Watzlawick et al. identified relational meaning only with the implicit, analogic characteristics of a message, Wilmot suggested that relational meaning (or "metacommunication") includes anything that contextualizes or frames a message, including such things as metaphor, explicit labels for a relationship, situational expectations, and the overall definition of a relationship held by its members. Wilmot concluded that the communication field has unnecessarily confined its focus to the behavioral patterns displayed in a specific episode of conversation.

## Family Themes and Images

The interpretive approach of Hess and Handel (1959) provides an alternative frame of reference for family research. Hess and Handel describe the social reailty of families as a collection of images that must fit together in order for family relationships to be compatible and stable. Whereas most family research views communication and relationship definition as an implicit negotiation of dominance or affect, Hess and Handel see communication as an effort to establish "a satisfactory congruence of individual and family images through the exchange of suitable testimony" (p. 6). Family images supply the definition of other members as objects of potential action. Images may tend to be integrated at a higher level of abstraction by pervasive family themes (e.g., "flight from insecurity" or "constructive independence") and a person's stature within the family may depend on the part she or he plays in upholding the family theme.

Semantic themes used to describe relationships have been studied by several people in the communication field (Kidd, 1975; Katriel & Phillipson, 1981; Owen, 1983; Knapp, Ellis & Williams, 1980; Dickson-Markman & Wheeless,

1980; Wiemann & Kreuger, 1980), although these studies did not have quite the same purpose as Hess and Handel's research. Hess and Handel contrasted families that differed radically in the content of their respective themes and images, whereas thematic analyses found in the communication field have done the opposite: they have treated intimate and family relationships as fairly homogeneous cultural categories, in order to identify, for example, the themes generally associated with married versus dating relationships (Owens, 1983) or with intimate relationships during the 1950's versus the 1970's (Kidd, 1975).

One person who has studied differences in relationship definition among couples is Fitzpatrick (1983). Fitzpatrick drew upon Hess and Handel and other qualitative studies in developing her instrument, which has proven successful in discriminating couples who possess different visions of marriage. Research using Fitzpatrick's instrument has also shown that communication patterns are perceived differently and have different effects depending on the overall definition of the relationship. For example, couples with a traditional ideology of marriage express an attitude of tactful restraint in their communication and communication patterns do not appear to be a strong indicator of their marital satisfaction, whereas "independent" couples are apparently more frank and cued to the level of self disclosure in the relationship (Fitzpatrick, 1977; Sillars, Pike, Jones & Redmon, 1983). Perhaps the main implication of this research and the earlier work of Hess and Handel is that the interpretation of a particular behavioral pattern is guided by recurring themes in a relationship.

## Development of a Typology for Coding Content Themes in Conversation

There are numerous subtle differences in the way that individuals define the institution of marriage and these differences are often directly reflected in the content of marital conversations. This point occurred to me partly from coding many hours of marital conversations for conflict styles. In previous studies my associates and I have had married couples discuss questions such as whether there was a "lack of communication" in the marriage, a lack of affection, or disagreement about the division of household tasks. A point that has continually stood out is the extent to which couples focus their comments on different aspects of each topic. In fact, they typically seem to have quite different meanings for terms such as "communication" and "affection" and they provide a much different account of the factors that affect communication, affection, irritability, role disagreement and so forth. It would be revealing simply to analyze the variety of response people gave to our question about communication. Various individuals identified the topic of communication with self disclosure (e.g., "we are open with one another"), understanding ("we have a hard time understanding the other person"), responsiveness ("you don't respond when I say things to you"), talkativeness ("we spend a lot of time talking"), fatigue ("I'm too tired when I get home to have communication"), expressivity ("I need to get things off my chest"), skill ("I'm not good at conversation"), conflict ("I don't like to argue"), shared interests ("you talk about trivial things"), problem solving ("we work out our problems together"), courtesy ("you leave the house without telling me"), exigency ("we discuss everything we have to"), appreciation ("you never say thank you"), affection ("you don't express affection"), gender ("men don't like to talk unless they have something to say"), joking ("we have the same sense of humor"), and so forth. Some of these examples reflect the dominant modern interpretation of communication in marriage. That is, communication is

seen as a means of showing intimacy and solving problems through self disclosure (Gadlin, 1977; Kidd, 1975). The responsibility for maintaining or improving communication is taken seriously and shared equally. Although this interpretation of communication is well represented in the examples, communication may also be seen as a fairly mundane act (e.g., talking a lot or giving simple, necessary information), as something that is an individual style, skill or personality characteristic, or as something that is governed by work schedules and other aspects of the couple's situation.

It may seem that the examples merely indicate what is presently salient to each person about the topic of communication. However, there is often a strong similarity in the way that individuals respond to a specific topic, such as communication, and the way they respond to the remaining topics. For example, a person may refer to the family of origins, belief in God, or gender on several different topics. For some individuals the need for "open communication" is used in this manner as a higher-order theme that is mentioned in conjunction with affection, parental discipline, irritability, work related stress and other diverse topics. Thus, more abstract perceptions of marriage are often reflected in a person's discussion of a specific topic.

Two associates, Judy Weisberg and Cynthia Burggraf, and myself have developed a classification scheme for coding content themes and we are presently applying the scheme to marital conversations. The categories are listed in a table on the ensuing page. A few considerations were especially influential in the way that we derived the typology. First we wanted to supply an alternative to impressionistic analyses of themes and images without sacrificing the richness of the description. Consequently, the categories are fairly sensitive to subtle differences in language but we did not attempt to draw distinctions that are highly inferential or that could not be coded reliably. We initially began coding a much larger set of categories than those described in the table but we found that many distinctions were difficult to make and we subsequently condensed the categories.

Second, we wanted a scheme that would classify all statements made during a discussion (excluding incomplete utterances, backchannel cues and the like). We simply had no a priori basis for excluding a large portion of the discussions from our coding, since nearly all statements provide some information about how a speaker interprets the topic. This is one point that distinguishes our approach from other methodologies, such as metaphor analysis and fantasy theme analysis.

Finally, we tried to strike a balance between an inductive and deductive definition of the categories. On the one hand, we wanted the categories to reflect nuances of meaning that were suggested by the data. On the other hand, we also wanted a cohesive set of categories that would reflect theoretically important distinctions. To maintain an inductive-deductive tradeoff, we initially had individuals who had little knowledge of the specific goals of the research read the complete transcripts from an earlier study and summarize the core propositions stated by each person on each topic. Next, two of us independently sorted the core propositions into a large number of descriptive categories and then resorted the descriptive categories into a smaller number of more abstract categories. The two of us discussed the differences in our categories, and through a process of discussing and resorting, we eventually arrived at an agreed-upon set of categories. Although

we relied heavily on our intuitions during the sorting process, we were also sensitized to distinctions that permeate the marital and family literature, such as companionate versus role constructs and togetherness-separateness. Further, we wanted to draw distinctions between different factors perceived to be responsible for the events in marriage. In this respect, we were particularly affected by authors such as Mills (1940) and Heider (1958), who've argued that motivational constructs (in the broadest possible sense of "motive") are the central elements of social perceptions. Consequently, our categories reflect different ways of construing the driving forces of marriage. Most generally, these forces may include negotiated patterns (companionate themes), separate identities and roles (individual themes) or the "nature of things" (impersonal themes).

Ultimately, we intend to address questions such as the following: Do the recurrent conversational themes of couples discriminate different types of marriages? Is there greater cohesiveness to the themes expressed by more compatible couples? What relationship exists between content themes and conflict styles? What relationship exists between content themes and social perception (e.g., coding and recall of conversation)?

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SUMMARY OF CONTENT THEMES

I. Companionate themes -- marriage is seen as the product of an active interdependence.

A. Togetherness
Includes references to sharing of time, activities, interests, attitudes, beliefs and values; enjoying each other's company, having basic similarities and compatibilities and working toward togetherness.

B. Cooperation (conscious, active working together to resolve problems)
Working collectively to resolve disputes and problems; joint decision making; letting the other person know about problems; having shared rights and responsibilities; mutual respect and consideration; managing arguments and conflicts.

C. Communication (expressive communication and verbal sharing)
Talking and sharing thoughts and feelings as a couple; having understanding of one another.

D. Romanticism
Having shared affection, being in love, having mutual physical affection and attraction.

II. Individual themes -- marriage is seen as the product of separate identities and roles.

A. Separateness
Having separate time, activities, interests, beliefs, attitudes, or values; wanting to avoid argument, discussion or collaboration; feeling overly regulated or monitored by the other person; seeking or having autonomy.

B. Personality
Having distinct individual traits (domineeringness, expressivity, moodiness, spontaneity, selfishness, appreciation, etc.), habits, skills and idiosyncracies that are not a function of organic or environmental factors (see the description of "organic" and "environmental" below).

C. Role
Having separate instrumental roles, performing roles adequately or inadequately, meeting formal or traditional responsibilities.

III. Impersonal themes -- marriage is seen as the product of factors that are largely or partly beyond the direct, personal control of the couple.

A. Organic properties
Normative, developmental and intrinsic characteristics of individuals, society or the institution of marriage that are seen as predetemining the nature of marriage, including gender, family background, developmental experiences, age, the duration of marriage, God and

religion, one's physical condition or physical characteristics, inherent cyclical or seasonal factors and accepted social norms.

B. Stoicism
Recognition that conflicts and problems are inherent in marriage and acceptance of moderate standards for satisfaction (i.e., establishing modest needs and expectations, putting problems aside or in perspective, coping, setting relative standards for satisfaction, or making comparisons with less favorable or similar marriages).

C. Environmental influence (individual choice is seen as preempted by the couple's situation)
References to externally imposed stress, scarce resources (e.g., time, money), preoccupation with outside responsibilities, or forced separation due to factors such as work and family obligations.

# Issues of Concern in the Stepfamily

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Family Communication Conference
Northwestern University
September, 1984

# Issues of Concern in the Stepfamily

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## Introduction

> Compare it to a chess game - challenging and complex. To a spider's web - delicate and intricate. Or to a toddler's birthday party- chaotic and confusing. Each analogy describes the stepfamily, a blended family unit that has evolved from the rising remarriage rate.
>
> (Stepfamily Bulletin, Fall 1980, p.1 )

The stepfamily is not a new social phenomenon, but it is an increasing one. There are more than 25 million stepparents nationally. At least one in five children in the U.S. lives within a stepfamily. (Stepfamily Bulletin, 1980)

Living in a stepfamily is a difficult propostion -- for all members of the family. Stepfamilies are born of death -- death of a marriage or death of a parent/spouse. Either event is traumatic for both children and adults. It is out of this trauma that stepfamilies are formed.

## Stepfamily Literature

Most of the literature concerning stepfamilies is not research-based. Most often the books and articles on stepfamilies are written by persons who are themselves stepparents. This is not to say that the advise and descriptions of step-relationships are not valid or helpful -- perhaps the advise of stepparents to other stepparents is the most valid and helpful advise of all. Stepfamilies need help and support NOW and research on stepfamilies is in its infancy.

Four basic types of research studies exist in the literature (Walker, et al., as cited in Visher and Visher, 1979, p. 39-40):

> 1) Studies of samples of stepfamilies which are not random or representative of the population, such as the Bernard study (1956) which used 2,009 informants who were students, colleagues and friends of the author, a sociologist, and resulted in a book-length study which was informative but not valid from a research point of view.
>
> 2) Studies of a large random sample, conducted at one point in time, of persons who are children of remarried parents. These studies are limited in that all data are obtained from one member of the remarriage family, whose report is based upon recall of experiences from a distant time.
>
> 3) Studies of small-scale random samples which focus on the aspect of the remarriage family. Duberman's work 1975) is an example. Her cases are drawn from the files a marriage license bureau in Cleveland, Ohio, and she focuses primarily on the quality of relationships among member of remarriage families.
>
> 4) Studies based on nonrandom samples, such as those drawn from clinic populations, who obviously are highly self-selected and may present special, nontypical problems.

Thus, a few research studies are "based on procedures which permit clear assessment of their validity, reliability, and generalization" (Walker, et al. 1977). However, an examination of the research and writings on stepfamilies suggest several common "issues" in stepfamilies:

1. Divided Loyalities
2. Jealousy
3. Problems of discipline
4. Unrealistic expectations
5. Definition and clarification of roles
6. Myths of instant love and the wicked stepmother

## Communication in the Stepfamily

Communication channels can become easily muddled in stepfamilies because of the individual's past histories and ways of doing things. Because there are more opportunities for misunderstanding, resentment, and hurt feelings in stepfamilies, effective communication is extremely important. Yet, research has not been conducted to analyze the communication patterns and the effect of them in stepfamilies. "How-to's" are abundant. Capaldi and McRae (1979) suggest the following communication exercises for stepfamilies:

1. Ventilation - One person is allowed to "let off steam" without being interrupted. When she or he "winds down" the listener gives one suggestion or makes one comment.
2. Feed back - The listener "Feedsback" to the speaker what she/he understood the speaker to say so that both parties understand each other.
3. Checking out assumptions - Family members make sure their assumptions for another's actions are correct so they can respond based on fact rather than fiction.

Rosenbaum and Rosenbaum (1977) present the following guidelines for communication:

1. Find an appropriate time and place to talk about feelings
2. Realize that anger is permissible.
3. Verbalize your anger.
4. Be responsible for defining your words.
5. Be kind.
6. Laugh at your mistakes.
7. Don't interrupt.
8. Have respect for each other's privacy

(p. 124-127)

These communication techniques sound helpful, and indeed they are. The problem lies in the fact that they are difficult-especially in a family in which turmoil and frustration abound. Perhaps our greatest contribution to helping stepfamilies is to conduct research which first analyzes their communication patterns and then compares the effectiveness of communication training programs. Simply telling stepfamilies the "how-to's" is probably not very effective without an understanding of the communication patterns and problems with which a stepfamily deals daily.

## Future Research

This idea brings me to some thoughts on stepfamily research directions. Based on the issues of concern in stepfamilies, the following areas of research seem particularly important:

1. A systems perspective -- Often we learn about stepfamilies from one member, usually the wife. Until we learn the perspectives of all members, it will be difficult to really understand the stepfamily phenomenon.

2. Observational studies as well as self-report studies -- This will be difficult since stepfamilies are understandably reluctant to have an "outsider" present.

3. Longitudinal studies which investigate stepfamily developmental stages -- My own experience suggest that a predictable pattern of development exists. The stages probably overlap and some are repeated. What is interesting about the stepfamily's developmental pattern is that often it begins with those stages characteristic of deteriorating relationships -- low self-disclosure, and low predictability, spontaniety, risk-taking, etc.

4. Decision-making in stepfamilies -- Often it is defacto-made without direct family approval, but nevertheless made to keep the family functioning.

5. Stages in relationship development -- Are the stages the same when we are forced to have a relationship with someone we may not even like (for example, our spouse's children)"?

6. Types of conflict in stepfamilies -- My guess is that most stepfamilies (at least the initial stages) utilize covert strategies -- denying problems exist, displacing problems onto stepchildren or ex-spouses, one or more members disengages from the stepfamily (one parent works late), disqualification so that when a problem surfaces it can quickly be denied or discounted, and pseudo-mutuality so that no disharmony in the stepfamily will be

apparent to outsiders (after all, if one marriage has failed, it's important this one be "perfect)."

7. Self-disclosure in stepfamilies -- self-disclosure, we are told, occurs in the context of positive social relationships. Since positive social relationships do not exist in most stepfamilies for the first 2-5 years, what types of self-disclosure are engaged in? What are the effects on family relationships? On future communication?

8. Types of power patterns and the outcomes of these -- Often stepparents feel that the stepchildren or the ex-spouses have the power.

9. Stepfamily roles --Stepfamily roles are ill-defined, role expectations are unrealistic, and role performance is difficult. Few of us grew up with a stepparent/stepchildren role model. (One stepmother puts in nicely: None of us grows up pushing a doll carriage and hoping to be a stepmother someday). When I asked a class recently to play a word association game in which I used the words stepmother, divorce, stepfather, half-sibling and stepchild, nearly all association words were negative. How does this negative attitude affect role emergence? What are the norms for stepmothers, stepfathers and stepchildren? How do stepfamilies define and organize stepparent roles? Research to determine what satisfactory ways stepfamileis have found to incorporate the stepparent role would be beneficial.

10. Boundaries -- How do stepfamilies negotiate the boundaries of
    a. Membership - Who are the "real" members of this family?
    b. Authority - who's in charge of discipline? Decision - making?
    c. Time-How is time divided? How much time do I get with my husband/wife? With my children?
    d. Space-Where do I "fit in?" What space is mine?

11. Images - What is the stepfamily's image of itself and what effect does this image have on cohesion and adapatability issues?

12. Themes - How does a stepfamily blend themes and create its own?

13. Networks - My own experience suggests that networks in stepfamilies are extremely complex. Who talks to whom, when, and about what (and how much about what) can be frustrating. What type of network is most beneficial to stepfamilies? What type is the most common?

14. The stepfamily is really a misnomer -- Since stepfamilies come in many forms research should take the form into consideration when discussing its findings.

15. Adjustment - No empirically tested program exists to aid stepfamilies in the adjustment process. The goal of research should be to provide needed information concerning stepfamilies so that programs can be devised and tested. The major solution prosently given to stepfamilies seems to be "Time heals all wounds."

## Conclusion

I do not mean to suggest in this paper that stepfamilies are completely different from other family forms. Stepfamilies deal with many of the same issues all families confront. However, in the stepfamily it is as if we are viewing these issues under a microscope -- they are magnified out of proportion and seem insurmountable.

Communication scholars, by conducting research from a communication perspective, can provide answers to enable us to develop communication - based programs which will de-magnify these issues.

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The entire issue of FAMILY RELATIONS, July 1984, volume 33 is devoted to the issue of stepfamilies.

# FAMILY AND WORK INTERACTION
# A MACROANALYSIS OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION

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# FAMILY AND WORK INTERACTION

## A MACROANALYSIS OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION

The recent focus upon family communication, deeply rooted in an interpersonal communication tradition, has so far been primarily focused upon the interpersonal politics among family members. However, communication among family members always occurs within a larger political context. We offer a model from which to focus upon the dynamics between family and work - the two social systems which in concert exert significant influence upon internal family communication patterns. Such a model can account for some of the external constraints which influence interpersonal family dynamics.

### The Estrangement of Family and Work

Historical Context. The negotiations of work and family issues were once conducted among people who lived and worked together. Today negotiations of work and family matters typically require the coordination of politics and priorities of separated social systems. These negotiations are inherently more difficult than they once were because there are no direct communication channels connecting families and work places. This evolution has taken its course amid economic and cultural changes stemming from the Industrial Revolution.

During Agrarian times the organizational activities of family and work were quite integrated. Curle (1949) describes life then as:

> ...all of a piece. It is not split, as it is for the majority of inhabitants of Western Europe and America, into what one does to earn a living - called work - and what one does during the rest of their time (p49).

Physical and psychological well being were personal issues since there was no health care industry except for the family doctor who provided limited care in familiar surroundings and the housewife who stored and administered medicinal herbs to her family (Starr, 1982). The economic environment was made up of relatively financially autonomous households whose economic viability rested more upon the varieties of nature than the vagaries of an industrial economy. The community provided insurance against economic and health crisis. Neighborly responsibility for such care took the form of barnraisings and food preparation, midwifery and child care during critical times. The connection between working for a living and living to take care of one's family and friends was so entrenched as to be invisible. Thus, the negotiations concerning when, where, how to coordinate family and work priorities took place in an environment where the financial and personal well being of individuals were the concern of a single decision making unit - the family.

Since the Industrial Revolution much of the care and control over financial and personal matters has shifted from family to the work place. The individual worker now has significantly less influence over working conditions: when, where, how much to work; or the financial, health or safety status of that environment. Family members, now separated from the

work place are less knowledgeable about the physical and social conditions at work and are therefore less able to be an effective supporter of the workers' well being. Their supportive communication efforts are made even less effective by the organization's lack of recognition of the supportive role of family members (Renshaw, 1976). Thus, many of the conditions which shape an individual's well being occur in a place where their family members have no direct access.

Modern places of business at the front of the Information Age have already developed the technology to locate, generate, analyze, store and communicate information among employees. This ability to process information efficiently and critically enables business to be more productive, adaptable, and more authorative and influential than would have been possible in Agarian times. However, the modern work place does not function from an unqualified position of strength. Since the separation of work and family places, employees in the United States have not been able to reproduce the sense of interdependence that once existed among people who lived and worked together. Employers have, in recent years made enormous investments insuring their employees' well-being and have taken financial risks that they will stay healthy and safe. Yet very little is known about the employees since they spend less than 25% of their total week at work; little is known about their health habits, attitudes or current life styles. For all the information available to employers in this computer age, they are poverty stricken when it comes to information about what their workers are doing and what they and their dependents want to do about their well being. This informational poverty is reinforced by the prevalent attitude that work and personal matters should remain separate.

To use an interpersonal mataphor, modern family and work systems are functioning as two disengaged spouces with children in common; once connected with ties of affection but now bound only by mutual economic obligations. This emotional estrangement between separated family and work systems has been anticipated by earlier observers of the industrialization of the United States. Marx, for example, argued that the advent of capitalism has resulted in alienating conditions which in turn produce alienative behavior among workers, both on and off the job (Marx and Engles, 1939). Durkheim (1947) warned that if the division of labor becomes too extensive individuals as well as institutions will be at risk of fragmentation. Feelings of estrangement and normlessness, engendered by such separation would then produce both feelings of anomic and anomic behavior according to Durkheim. If Durkheim is correct, emotional estrangement at the institional level of systemic interaction will be felt at the interpersonal level of interaction as well. A review of a few of the recent family/work dynamics points to their reflection in interpersonal communication between husbands and wives, parents and children, and employers and employees.

## Family Adaptations to Work

Recent overviews of the relationship between work and family systems (Voydanoff, 1984, Lee and Kamungo, 1984) suggest that the family system has been undergoing major adaptations to meet the demands of a relatively indifferent work system. In fact, the family structure has undergone fundamental changes during the last fifty years in efforts to adapt to work demands. The traditional family is no longer the typical family. First,

the extended family is now dispersed, as families move for new job opportunities and promotions. Also, the majority of women, including wives and mothers, now work outside the home (Voydonoff 1984). Already the "typical family" - the single provider family - makes up only 11% of households. The new typical family is one in which there is no adult at home during the day.

At the root of the family adaptions to work demands are the changes which have occurred in sex roles. Jessie Bernard (1981) traces the evolution of sex roles in America in her essay on "The Good Provider Role: It's Rise and Fall". She argues that the physical separation of work duties and family life have challenged expectations for how people are to interact. Men were expected to be "provide" for their wives and children, while women were expected to be provided for economically while taking responsibility for the nurturing and emotional needs in the family. In this division of labor by gender the provider role took precedence over the nurturing role since, "by definition any family behaviors must be subordinate to [the provider role] in terms of significance and [the job] has priority in the event of a clash" (Scanzoni, 1975, p. 38).

The recent return of women to a separate place of work has, Bernard claims, led to the decline of the good-provider role. Although women's return to the work place has benefited women and families in many ways, this change has created dual financial providers but the question of who will provide the nurturance in families has not been resolved satisfactorily. Accordingly, there are no reliable models for facilitating a transition

from a patriarchal to an egalitarian relationship. Thus, modern married couples often find themselves trying to renegotiate a new equality while both are deferring family priorities to the demands of their work.

For example, work has always set some external constraints on how families manage their time. But, the traditional family, where the woman schedules family interaction and tasks around her husband's work schedule, makes up only 7 percent of American families today (Voydanoff, 1984). Now the competition for time and its scheduling is influenced by two work places. With dual providers, time for play and work at home is something which must be negotiated to accommodate two work schedules. Relational status is being negotiated during these interpersonal scenes as well.

Several analyses of time budget data (Walker, 1969; Meissner et al, 1975; Robinson, Justice, and Stafford, 1976) have shown that wives holding paid jobs outside the family spend less time performing family tasks than wives not so employed. Husbands of wives who work outside the home do not contribute more time to household chores than husbands whose wives are not employed (Walker, 1970). According to Pleck and Rustad's (1980) study of time use, husbands of employed wives contributed about thirteen hours of family work per week, in comparison to their wives' contribution of about twenty-eight hours. Husbands of employed women spend, according to this study, about 15 minutes more per week in family work than husbands of unemployed wives. In essence, the division of labor between husbands and wives is rarely equally divided anymore even in families with egalitarian values (Richmond, 1976). According to Kamerman's research (1980), this arrangement is unsatisfactory to many women. Additionally both men and

women report that the problems they have in negotiating family and work time detracts from their sense of interpersonal intimacy (Hoffman, 1974). It is apparently very difficult for dual providers to recapture satisfactory interpersonal nurturance. Therefore recent family adjustments to work time constraints have come with a high emotional price.

Family accomodations to work have also affected the parent-child relationship. Even though employed married women enhance the family's resources, contributing about one-fourth of the family income, and 40 percent, if employed full time (Hayghe, 1979), resources are diminished in other ways. When both parents are working child care is needed for preschool children and supervision must be found for children after school. One immediate implication of this change in family organization is that children are spending less time interacting with other family members and more time watching television. They are also interacting more with people of different values, goals and attitudes than their parents. Children are becoming more sophisticated, challenging traditional authoritarian parenting styles (Myerowitz, 1985). Parents have expressed concern over their separation from their children even though the quality of parent-child attachment behavior's apparently do not decrease among day-care children (Caldwell etal 1970; Cornelious and Denny, 1975; Maskowvitz etal 1977). Thus, parent-child interactions are conducted from positions of ambivilance and insecurity on the part of parents.

While the family has undergone enormous structural change in deferrence to work demands, the work system is making some adjustments too. Some businesses are beginning to acknowledge the connection between personal and

work problems. Starting with alcoholism treatment programs for employees and families, a few employee assistance programs have extended their care to financial, health and emotional problems (Sullivan, 1984). Some large corporations are organizing preventive health care programs and providing exercise rooms, diet workshops, seminars dealing with reduction of stress, personal development and career pathing. Others are offering day care programs for employee children along with flexible work options for working parents (Voydanoff, 1984).

However, these new work place accommodations are not comparable to the adjustments made by families. They are designed to improve employee satisfaction for the purpose of increasing productivity, not for the purpose of facilitating family needs. It remains common practice to refrain from bringing personal or family problems to work. Therefore, while the family system continues to accommodate work demands, the work place has demonstrated relatively little reciprocal adjustment.

Accommodating in an Estranged Relationship. There is nothing inherently pathological in systemic accommodations. If fact adaptations to the environment are typically regarded as characteristic of a healthy open system. However, there appears to be a uneasy tension in the interaction between two highly interdependent but estranged systems where one is making most of the unappreciated accommodations. This form of interaction may contribute to the fragmentation of both family and work systems and of the individuals trying to balance their lives between them.

Although this premise has not yet been tested empirically at the institutional level of interaction, there is evidence of its validity at the interpersonal level. When the family-work interaction, as characterized in this model, is found in a married couple, family theorists and therapists alike view it as dysfunctional (Martin, 19776; Jurg, 1982; Gurman, 1978). That is, when one individual has no access to information concerning a significant other's perceived needs, values, goals etc, yet continues to adjust to the "non communicative" other this pattern of escalating asymmetry between "powerful" and "powerless" individuals is considered dysfunctional for both. This characterization is not out of line with the current image of the powerful corporate organizations and the fragmented, decentered family systems in America.

## Inside the Family

Based upon the premises of systems theory, interaction patterns at one level of a system (eg between husband and wife) will be reflected in the interactions of other levels (eg between siblings). If this principle is generalizable, the interaction at the institutional level (eg between family and work systems) will be found at the interpersonal level (eg between employees and employees, husbands and wives, parents and children). We anticipate, based upon this model, that interpersonal scenes where family and work priorities are being coordinated will reflect the asymmetrical institutional interactions in the following way:

> The interactant representing the work perspective will assume an unnegotiable position, while the interactant defending the family perspective will assume an accommodating position. Both interactants will experience dissatisfaction with this inequitable arrangement but neither will be able to alter the escalating asymmetry between them.

This form of interaction, when repeated over a period of time, will inhibit the successful coordination of equality between individuals even though interpersonal interaction between two loving and equal people may be desirable by both interactants. Three scenarios illustrate the dilemma this model suggests:

Transfer. The work policy concerning transfer which has remained virtually unquestioned is that promotion and job opportunity justify transfer to another location. In many instances failure to take a promotion aborts the employee's job advancement; s/he is "plateaued". In interpersonal interaction between an employer offering the promotion/transfer and an employee, the employer's offer will appear justifiably unnegotiable to both interactants, leaving the employee little choice but to try to accommodate his/her family needs to this "opportunity". This dilemma extends further into internal family dynamics as the employee, representing this work perspective expects family members to adjust to it. It is particularly problematic when his or her spouse must defend the priorities of the family and of his or her own work place. The likely resolution of this dilemma will result in a family move which in addition to the tension it creates inside the family, further contributes to the dispersement of the extended family support system.

Time Management. When time is being coordinated in dual - career families individuals defending family time usually defer to relatively inflexible work priorities. The resolution, even when it does not create conflict, diminishes time individuals have to devote to joint play, nurturing, and relaxation activities. This loss not only detracts from the quality of

family life, but also from the quality of work an overstressed employee can bring to his or her work place.

Parent-Child Interaction. Most employees still assume no responsibility for accommodating to children. Traditional work hours and rigid separation of family concerns from the work place are still the norm. This form of indifference to dual provider family needs on the part of employers influences what children learn from their parents about the relationship between family and work. Parents, constrained by traditional work schedules, teach their children by forced example that work is a higher priority regardless of what is spoken about it. Double messages such as "I love you but I have to work during your play tomorrow morning" are inevitable when parents attempt to justify their work priorities. While these scenes may or may not detract from the immediate quality of parent child interaction the lesson that children learn is that family concerns orbit around the stationary constraints at work. Thus the imbalance between family and work is perpetuated from one generation to another, through parent child interactions.

## Summary

We have argued that the nature of the dynamics between family and work influences interpersonal communication in families. The asymmetrical family work relationship appears to be dysfunctional, contributing to dysfunctional family interaction where the imbalance is reflected in intimate relationships. It is further suggested that intervention at the interpersonal level will not resolve the accompanying interpersonal

communication dilemmas until the disabling institutional interactions are improved. It is therefore crucial that communication scholars address both the institutional and interpersonal levels of interaction in our theory and research.

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Note

Support and resources for this project were provided in part by the Ætna Institute for Corporate Education, Hartford, Ct.

# Bio-Cultural Evolution in the Family

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Running Head: EVOLUTION IN THE FAMILY

## Bio-Cultural Evolution in the Family

Beginning in the war years social scientists became increasingly interested in the notion of "interaction process." The movement was away from static explanations of behavior grounded in theories of individual differences and toward a new perspective grounded in a blend of cybernetics and symbolic interactionism. This new view held that the behavior of an individual actor might result, at least in part, from participation within patterned sequences of communication. Much excitement was generated by this emerging perspective. Sociologists, social psychologists, psychiatrists, and the new social-scientifically trained scholars in the area of communication studies moved quickly to examine the profits of interaction analysis and the process view.[1]

The new perspective differed from the old in its conceptions of, and in the importance attributed to, the concepts: time, development, and change. Prior to the emergence of the process perspective, the past had been regarded as the locus for present behavior. Psychoanalytic theory in particular had directed attention toward an individual's history, especially childhood experience, in the search for explanations for action in the present. Although the analytic orientation was largely supplanted by behaviorism, that too relied upon the history of the organism to explain current behavior. The new process orientation, however, presumed that present behavior might be explainable in terms of the structure of on-going interaction sequences in which individuals participate. Accordingly, researchers became interested in developing methods for identifying and analyzing recurrent sequences of behavior as they were manifest in the present and as they unfolded into the future. Research techniques were first

developed for the analysis of interaction in artificial laboratory group settings. They were soon exported, however, to study interaction processes in naturally occurring groups, notably work groups in business and industry and family groups.

Interaction process analysis in the family came to maturity in the mid-1960's as optimistic, technologically enamored social scientists devised a plethora of interaction generating tasks and systems for coding communication and behavior. The field of family therapy was, by then, firmly established and its practitioners encouraged the development of process orientations. Family therapists began to look at their client-families through the lens of the process view and described them using concepts from information theory, cybernetics, and system theory (e.g.: feedback, redundancy, communication channels, homeostasis).

The excitement generated by the process conception has continued to generate considerable research. However, in the mid-1970's another re-alignment began to occur. The basis for this third perspective stemmed from a resurgence of interest in the contributions of evolutionary and genetic biologists to the understanding of social behavior. The explanations of social behavior offered by these theorists also hinge upon temporal movement, development, and interaction process. However the position takes a middle ground between, on the one hand, that of the past-oriented individual difference or trait theorists, and on the other, that of the present-oriented symbolic interactionists, systems theorists, and cyberneticians.

My purpose in this discussion will be to provide a brief overview of the evolutionary view in which I emphasize the central role attributed to family process within this perspective. Although the

limits of this paper prohibit a detailed treatment, I hope that, however cursory the presentation, it will serve as a stimulus for further study in the area. The evolutionary perspective places considerable importance on communication process within consanguineous groups and there are signs that it is attracting interest across the range of social science disciplines. It is, therefore, quite possible that those of us who specialize in family communication might find something of interest in this perspective and, further, I believe that we may be in a unique position to contribute to its refinement.

Within the evolutionary frame, patterns of interaction evolve from the past into the future and they do so through two channels of transmission, a genetic channel and a cultural channel, each of which constrains the other (i.e., they are interactive). Since models of cultural transmission are familiar to social scientists they will only be treated briefly while the focus will be a discussion of genetic transmission. This should not be construed as an attempt to treat these processes as separable, additive components in a linear-causal system. However, by contrast with the genetic channel, the evolutionary rates of influence within the cultural channel are extremely accelerated. Therefore, at any point in time it is possible to treat various phenotypic characteristics as though they were single channel effects and it will be desirable to do this from time to time for illustrative purposes. Nevertheless, the bio-cultural evolutionary processes envisioned are holistic, inseparable, and mutually causal.

Genetic Variation

The bio-evolutionary account of social behavior begins with the notion that some of the variance in the behavior of individual organisms may be explained by differences between them in their biological inheritance. Visual accuity, for example, varies between

individuals and this variation is no doubt partly due to simple differences in biological development. Modern biology posits that bodies develop under the direction of portions of chromosomes called genes whose job is to order the assembly of amino acids into proteins. These proteins, in turn, are arranged into increasingly complex structures culminating in a fully functioning organism.

Genes influence the structure, development, and behavior of organisms. In some cases, the phenotypic expression of a genetic influence may be rather direct, as in genes for eye color. However, it may also be expressed indirectly. For example, genes may direct the development of an organism's hormonal system which, in turn, may influence behavior through the calibration of optimal periods of physiological activity. The notion that genes may have anything to do with human social behavior has tended to arouse considerable unrest among social scientists. This is, no doubt, partly due to the tendency of some social biologists, behavior geneticists, and some journalistic accounts of the evolutionary position to zealously exaggerate the possibilities for direct genetic control of behavior in humans, and to do so with little apparent regard for the role of conscious choice or social processes such as modeling or learning.

The attacks mounted by social scientists and others against the the evolutionary position have at times been as vicious as they have been vigorous. They have ranged beyond the accurate criticism that some proponents of evolutionary position are ill-informed about the facts of human behavior and have often degenerated into destructive polemics.[2] Some read into evolutionary theory a position which supplies wholesale endorsement of tooth and claw capitalism, racism, sexism, and other anti-democratic and anti-humanistic values. In fact, the history of the evolutionary argument supplies some unfortunate

examples of the mis-representation of the position to further evil sectarian goals. Nevertheless, much of the polemic turbulence now seems to be subsiding. This is indeed fortunate since the alternative to integration is the re-entrenchment of an unhealthy dualism in social theory: one theory for the body and biological development and one for the mind and culture.[3]

Genetic Transmission

In most sexually reproductive species each parent supplies one half of the genetic material of the offspring. When offspring reproduce, they in turn contribute one half of their genes to their own offspring. This establishes a vertical chain of decreasing biological relatedness down successive generations of a family lineage and a horizontal chain of decreasing relatedness across branches of an extended family network. Children have one half of their genes in common with their parents; grandparents have one quarter of their genes in common with their grandchildren; siblings share one half of their genes (however, identical twins share 100% of their genes); first cousins share one eighth of their genes, etc.

Different environments may favor organisms equipped with different gene combinations. For an environment to favor an organism means that the resultant outcome of that particular gene/environment interaction is an enhanced probability of reproduction. For example, in a species which showed variation in sex A for a quality such as the willingness to assist in parenting following reproduction, members of sex B who, through random mutation, expressed an ability to discriminate and mate with parenting-oriented members of sex A, might well have a slightly higher probability of producing offspring who survive to maturity and reproduce again. This would be likely to apply in cases where the presence of two adults are required for defense of

the young or for their sustenance while they develop into optimally functioning adults. The net effect of this would be a greater frequency of discriminating members of sex B. In this regard, it should be emphasized that the current social behavior of the species itself comprises a crucial part of the environment within which a genetically influenced behavior is expressed.

This is the style of explanation used by bio-evolutionary theorists to describe the emergence of particular types of social behavior within sexually reproductive animal species such as ourselves. If the manner in which members of one sex relate to the other or the manner in which members of one sex relate to other members of the same sex has bearing upon the probabilities of reproduction, then, to the extent that those behaviors are influenced genetically, the behaviors comprising those relationships will be either reinforced or extinguished over the long haul of time. This is what is meant by the process of bio-evolutionary or natural selection. Bio-evolution is seen as a process of trial and error adaptation of a species to its environment. It is also an unending process since the physical environment is modified by the behavior of the species and since the changing behavior of the species itself constitutes one of the most relevant aspects of the environment of adaptation.

The articulation of selection processes (sometimes referred to as selection pressures) to describe the development of human social behavior has proven to be particularly incendiary to the critics of this perspective. Bio-evolutionary theorists have been accused of manufacturing from the cuff all sorts of "just so" stories to demonstrate bio-evolutionary influences on current human social behavior. The problem, of course, is that it is particularly difficult to study non-obvious bio-evolutionary processes because they may take

many generations to produce measurable effects.[4] The effects of social process and conscious choice, by contrast, are immediately obvious. This disparity, however, does not supply adequate reason to disregard the possibility of bio-evolutionary influence.[5]

Kin Selection

To summarize, bio-evolution places a premium on those traits or capabilities which allow the organism to reproduce, and in so doing, to continue to contribute to the gene pool. It is not the organism's survival per se that is important in selection, but rather the organism's transmission of its own genetic code through reproduction. If it was individual survival which was at issue, this would be grounds to assume the worst about the substrate of biological influences underlying human nature. Culture aside for the moment, selection for individual survival would result in the creation of species in which there were strongly programmed tendencies to engage in self-interested action only. To the contrary, selection for survival of gene-lines provides at least one basis for the bio-evolutionary selection of altruistic or cooperative behavior. This possibility is discussed in the bio-evolutionary literature under the heading of kin selection.

The process of kin selection allows for the possibility of altruistic behavior towards genetically related individuals. For example, in a family group consisting of two parents and five offspring there may be occasions when self-sacrifice for other family members represents an excellent evolutionary strategy (i.e., it would be likely to be selected by evolution). Each of the offspring has one half of his or her genes in common with each parent. In the event that the family group was threatened by a predator, evolutionary selection might encourage a parent's self-sacrifice if it would insure the

survival of the offspring (their future reproductive success is assumed). According to kin selectionists, this altruistic behavior might be selected over time since it ensures the survival of the greatest number of gene copies.

The development of bio-evolutionary theory witnessed a period of intense debate over the question of what it is that responds to selection pressures. At various times theorists have argued that selection operates upon individuals (individual selection), unrelated but co-active groups of individuals (group selection), and consanguineous groups (kin selection). Most modern theorists have now agreed that, except in rare circumstances, selection operates via kin selection. The kin selectionist position places unique emphasis upon altruistic interaction in the context of the family as well as in the process of family formation or mate selection.

Bio-evolutionary theorists recognize other mechanisms for the development of altruism as well. However, the process of kin selection is particularly relevant because it underscores the uniqueness of family bonds. Because of increased genetic similarity, interaction between family members is expected to be more cooperative, conciliatory, honest, and self-sacrificing than interaction between those who are genetically dissimilar (Alexander, 1979). Although parents are not as similar to each other as they are to their children, their mutual investment in childrearing may also foster altruistic behavior. Trivers' (1972) theory of parental investment addresses sources of cooperation and conflict between mates (see also Mackey, 1980). In addition, there are also some developmental circumstances which may give rise to parent/offspring conflicts (see Dawkins, 1982 and Ruse, 1979).

Without taking account of the cultural component of evolution it

is impossible for the restricted biological evolutionary model to provide specific prediction of human behavior. However at the most general level the model suggests there may be a biological substrate underlying family interaction processes which may differentiate them in kind from those which occur in other contexts. The recognition of bio-evolution also encourages a rigorous examination of exclusively cultural or social process accounts of male/female differences in communication behavior (cf. Rossi, 1984). Specifically, evolutionary theory suggests a role for biology in the origin of sex-specific norms for courtship and suggests that reproduction may serve as the basis for male/female cooperation in prolonged relationships. It suggests further that an initial asymmetry of biological investment in reproduction (from a biological perspective, females initially make a substantially greater investment than males) may produce patterns of strain and competition between mates (see Dawkins, 1976 and Trivers, 1972). Finally, at a general level, the evolutionary perspective leads to a close examination of phenomena associated with erotic arousal and sexuality (see Symons, 1979) as they differ for the sexes.

Cultural Evolution

Although it is posited that genes may broadly calibrate an organism's possibilities for action, bio-evolution alone cannot explain the enactment of any particular human social behavior at any particular point in time. Biology may be viewed as setting the stage for interaction by determining the individual's morphology which itself calibrates the individual's range of possible responses. However, the influence of the multiple cultures in which the human individual is enmeshed is much more direct. For example, it is possible to view C. G. Jung's authorship of Psyche and Symbol as caused, in part, by genetically transmitted factors which, among

others, (a) established a potential range of finger dexterity allowing for the comfortable use of a pen and (b) predisposed him to acquire sufficient intellectual and creative capacity. However, the fact that he wrote that work was more directly the product of factors such as his membership in a culturally distinct community of psycho-analytic scholars who subscribed to a norm of scholarly production. Consciousness and culture are unique, emergent properties of human sociality and cannot, in any case, be reduced to biology. The process of bio-evolution only sets the stage upon which the drama of cultural evolution unfolds. Bio-evolution, therefore, constrains action without determining it.

Bio-evolutionary concepts may serve as useful heuristic devices in the analysis of cultural transmission. Human cultures develop and change across time. They are embodied in physical artifacts and in the consciousness of their constituents. Human culture is also arranged hierarchically making it sensible to speak of sub-cultures existing within a dominant culture. The family comprises one such sub-cultural unit. Its members often share an idiosyncratic set of meanings through which they interpret the world and they are bound together by an emergent set of interactional, perceptuál, and interpretational rules communicated through an idiosyncratic code.

It is in the family that the processes of biological and cultural evolution intersect directly. Many have viewed the family as one of the principle institutions for the transmission of culture and it is the only context for genetic transmission. Several strictly cultural models of cross-generational transmission in the family exist. These emanate from sources such as modeling theory, object-relations theory, symbolic interactionism, and social learning theory. Among the variables which have been investigated for intergenerational

transmission are: (a) marital instability (Greenberg & Nay, 1982; Heiss, 1972; Pope & Mueller, 1976); (b) political, social, and religious values (Bengtson, 1975; Hoge, Petrillo, & Smith, 1983; Jennings & Niemi, 1968; Newcomb & Svehla, 1937; Niemi, Ross, & Alexander, 1978; Troll, Newgarten, & Kraines, 1969); (c) orientations toward achievement, success, and upward social mobility (Furstenberg, 1971); (d) interpersonal competence and assertiveness (Filsinger & Lamke, 1983; Shilling, 1979); (e) sexual behavior (Newcomber & Udry, 1984); and (f) a number of general personality traits and life style characteristics (see Troll, Bengtson, & McFarland, 1979 for a review). However, none of these models have proven particularly powerful in predicting transmission effects in the family (see Troll, et al., 1979).

One possible explanation for the predictive failure of models of cultural transmission in the family is that, in their current versions, they have tended to ignore the complex influences of the multiple social environments in which a child participates. Although culture re-creates itself, more or less, in every individual through a process of transmission, borrowing from bio-evolution, it seems profitable to begin asking questions about how particular social styles may represent adaptations to specific social environments. In another vein, we know that there is considerable diversity within families in regard to their rules for communication, organizational style, divisions of labor, etc. It seems potentially profitable to begin asking questions about the extent to which an evolutionary model, modified to allow for learning and conscious choice, might account for similarities within siblings in their social style as well as structural similarities between family of origin and family of procreation. This seems an especially profitable point of view when

considering the transmission of any social behavior which may have a particularly strong tie to physiology.

## Conclusion

Bio-evolutionary concepts of human social behavior can potentially enrich our understanding of what is important and distinct about family interaction. It is in the family that the forces of both biological and cultural evolution intersect directly. The family, therefore, functions as the juncture of human change and development. Although bio-evolutionary theory by itself cannot be expected to provide an adequate account of human communication behavior, neither can purely cultural or social process accounts be expected to endure if they ignore that human communication occurs in a biologically constrained species still actively involved in a multi-million year process of development.

## Notes

1. This was the period that gave birth to double-bind theory and the cybernetic analysis of "relational communication". It was also the period during which studies of interaction processes in small groups mushroomed to gigantic proportion (see Hare, 1976). Journals, such as Family Process, were inaugurated which specialized in the publication of research and theory within the new perspective.

2. See, for example, Sahlins (1977), Ruse (1979), Alexander (1979), Lewontin, Rose, and Kamin (1984), and Dawkins (1982) for a sense of the intensity of this debate. In an article otherwise complementary to the evolutionary position, Luckmann (1979) has gone so far as to compare biologists' scholarly excursions into human sociality to the Mongol hordes crossing the Great Wall to invade the sophisticated and complex Chinese culture of the Middle Ages.

3. The arguments for integration are developed in Rossi (1984), Migley (1980), and, especially, Lewontin, Rose, and Kamin, (1984).

4. The time scale involved stretches into millions of years since the mechanisms of selection take many generations to demonstrate effects. The fact that the process is so slow by contrast with human cultural or social evolution renders it virtually invisible.

5. Guttentag and Secord (1983), for example, have constructed a cogent argument to the effect that the ratio of human males to females -- a factor which is ordinarily determined genetically -- can have a profound influence on relationship norms. Although social processes are responsible for all recorded occurrences of

unusual sex ratio imbalances, the normal ratio (approximately 104 males to every 100 females), which places its own constraints upon social interaction, is maintained genetically.

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Self and Spouse Primary Communication Inventory:

A Measure of Perceptual Congruency

presented at the

SPEECH COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION and NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Family Communication Research Conference

Northwestern University

September, 1984

by

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Self and Spouse Primary Communication Inventory:

A Measure of Perceptual Congruency

The assessment of communication behaviors and practices of family members is a major concern for family practitioners, clinicians and researchers. Because of the complexity of marital communication, many researchers agree in using multimeasuring techniques. The notion or illusion that there is one best method (self-report, spouse observational check list, home observation, laboratory observation scoring) for measuring communication occurring between intimates has been dispelled. Several different measurement procedures have been constructed for assessing the marital behaviors and communication of husbands and wives (Filsinger & Lewis, 1981). Cromwell, et al. (1976) aptly suggest that research aimed at assessing patterns of husband and wife communication should use both subjective and objective data for understanding the complexity of intimate interaction. Because meanings of acts ultimately reside within people and not in behaviors or symbols, the subjective and objective perceptions from both persons who are directly involved may be useful in understanding patterns of interactions in long-term relationships. Olson (1981, p. 78) poses a significant question regarding assessments of complex family systems: "...whose definition of reality is most important, those who are directly involved in the relationship (inside members 'subjective'), or those who externally observe those individuals (outside researchers 'objective')?" The perspective taken for assessment of the "realities" of marriage greatly affects what is learned about the patterns and forms of interaction. Thus, the use of only one method for obtaining data will most likely conceal, rather than reveal, the complete patterns of communication practices and behaviors (Cromwell & Peterson, 1981). Information obtained

from both the self and the spouse may provide different perspectives of their communication practices.

Communication practices are operationally defined, in this paper, as those speaking and listening acts in which individuals frequently engage, but usually do not possess a specific count or an acute awareness of each act that occurs (Yelsma, 1984). Communication behaviors, on the other account, are those acts which have been overtly observed and can be more clearly identified each time they occur. Self- and spouse-reported data usually are reflected assessments of communication practices; whereas, laboratory or observed coded data are assessments of communication behaviors.

Research procedures which utilize multiple methods of assessing the concatenous, but fleeting, flow of verbal and nonverbal "messages" between intimates often provide quite varied results. Different perspectives occur not because one method is, by design, more valid than the others, but because each method focuses on different, though interrelated, sets of properties within the husband and wife relationship.

One potential source of data about family patterns resides simply in the differences between the members' cognitions of what they observe about one another. Margolin (1981, p.91) provides an interesting perspective regarding the assessment of relationships as systems: "The partners in a marital relationship are constantly influencing and controlling one another in a continuous flow of interaction. Thus, it is both theoretically and clinically inadvisable to attempt to understand the behavior of one member independently of the other." One participant does not clearly understand the impact he/she has on the other until interpretations of acts are shared

with the other participant. Equally important in studying patterns of interaction are the expectations of what one looks for in a set of behaviors and the perceptual biases a receiver has toward a spouse´s behaviors. The precognitions about oneself and one´s partner certainly influence the process of creating meaning between two people. Both of these factors greatly affect the interpretation of the communication process. Moreover, we know that the effects of all messages (verbal and nonverbal) are influenced by situational expectations, hidden agendas or sentimental overrides. Although the cognitive and affective interpretations each family member makes of one another´s communication practices cannot easily be directly measured "there is clear and abundant evidence that the emotional predispositions of family members toward the other members of their families account for a substantial amount of the variance and discriminative validity of family measures directed toward cognitive and behavioral levels" (Lowman, 1981, p. 61).

The use of both self- and spouse-report methods of collecting data in intimate relationships is insufficiently explored. Major benefits could result from a communication assessment procedure which examines the cognitive differences between self and spouse interpretations of communicative practices. There exist at least three different cognitive appraisals or interpretations participants and observers can attach to others´ behaviors: 1) the interpretation provided by the transmitter, 2) the interpretation provided by the receiver of an intimate message (which may be more important than the transmitter´s interpretation), and 3) the interpretations provided by trained coders who observe behaviors within a systemic, conceptual framework.

Primary Communication Inventory

Some preliminary research on husband and wife perceptual congruency has been conducted using the Primary Communication Inventory (PCI), but psychometric weaknesses are identified in the instrument as it now stands (Beach & Arias, 1983; Yelsma, 1984). The instrument was initially designed by Locke, Sabagh, & Thomes (1956) and later modified by Navran (1967). Results from Navran's communication and adjustment study are widely referenced regarding communication differences existing between "happy" and "unhappy" married couples. Two studies presently known to the author have provided supportive reliability and construct validity of the P C I.

Yelsma (1984, p. 35) conducted a partial replication of Navran's study and suggests that "The PCI may be a more effective measure of perceptual agreement if the same types of questions asked of husband or wife are also asked of the spouse." He also indicates that the instrument may be more effective if appropriate numbers of items are added so that there will exist an equal number of self-report and spouse-report items. Beach and Arias (1983), testing similar subjects to those used by both Navran and Yelsma, presented the PCI items to a principle axis factor analysis with varimax rotation. They selected only those items that loaded .40 or greater in the two major factors. The authors (1983, p. 312-313) conclude that the "Inspection of the items, however, fails to confirm Navran's specifications of verbal and nonverbal factors...we see clear evidence that Navran's originally proposed subscales are not yielding cohesive sets of items." The two factors which did emerge are related to the persons who actually rated an individual's communication practices. These two factors

are self and spouse communication assessment. A high correlation (r=.61) between these two scales reveals that a significant relationship exists between "an individual's judgment or perception of his or her own communication ability...and that same individual's communication ability as perceived by the spouse" (Beach & Arias, 1983, p. 314). Beach and Arias (1983, p. 314) also state that "the PCI may be used to determine discrepancies between perceptions of each member of the marital dyad." The PCI effectively measures verbal communication differences between "happy" and "unhappy" couples' communication practices.

The intent of this research project is to modify the PCI so that it can be used as a more effective measure of discrepancies between the cognitions of each member of the adult dyad. Several changes were made in the revised instrument. First, all of those items which did not discriminate between "happy" and "unhappy" married individuals in Navran's and Yelsma's studies were deleted. Second, all those items that did not have high factor loadings (.40 or higher) in the two subscales, spouse and self, were deleted from the instrument. Two nonverbal items were retained because they are effective discriminators with the two diverse groupings of married individuals. Two "mind reading" items were eliminated because they do not directly measure some specific communication practice. Of the original 32 items used by Navran, Yelsma, and Beach and Arias, only 18 items were retained.

One area of communication not adequately assessed by items in the PCI is the interaction associated with intimacy. Only one statement assessing issues relating to sexual relationships was present in the PCI. Given the complex emotional forces associated with sexual relations, a decision was

made to extend the scope of the assessment items to include several specific communication practices that often occur between two sexually intimate partners. Twelve items, adapted from two instruments designed by Bienvenu (1968, 1977) and modified by Yelsma (1984), were included in the new instrument. Other communication practices were identified which had not been assessed by direct questions. Eighteen new items were designed to assess behaviors such as initiating conversation, withholding important information, inappropriately changing the subject, yielding to the spouse while discussing difficult issues, using humor, interrupting, prying into private thoughts, criticizing, and lecturing.

After redesign of the instrument has been completed, an attempt will be made to conduct a pilot study using both the Marital Typology Inventory by Filsinger and Lewis (1973) or the Marital Typology Instrument by Fitzpatrick (1979) to determine if different types of couples have greater or lesser perceptual congruency of self and partner's communication practices.

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## Primary Communication Inventory

Below is a list of items on communication practices related to ways people interact with each other who live together. In the columns on the right are five possible responses. Opposite each item, circle the number which best represents the extent to which YOU behave in the specified way.

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5 Very frequently
4 Frequently
3 Occasionally
2 Seldom
1 Never

1. How often do you talk over pleasant things with your partner that happen during the day? 5 4 3 2 1

2. How often do you talk over unpleasant things with your partner that happen during the day? 5 4 3 2 1

3. Do you talk over things with your partner that your partner disagree about or has difficulties over? 5 4 3 2 1

4. Do you talk about things in which you are both interested? 5 4 3 2 1

5. Do you adjust your message to fit with the way your partner seems to feel at the moment? 5 4 3 2 1

6. Do you know when to avoid certain unresolved subjects in conversation? 5 4 3 2 1

7. Do you explain or express your deepest needs to your partner? 5 4 3 2 1

8. Do you discuss things with your partner before making an important decision? 5 4 3 2 1

9. Do you discuss matters of sex with your partner? 5 4 3 2 1

10. Do you use words with your partner which have special meanings and are not understood by outsiders? 5 4 3 2 1

11. How often do you sulk or pout (feel pity for your self)? 5 4 3 2 1

12. Do you discuss your most sacred (Holy) beliefs without feelings of restraint or embarrassment? 5 4 3 2 1

13. Do you tell your partner things which put you in a bad light or way? 5 4 3 2 1

14. When you have personal problems, how often do you talk with your partner about these problems? 5 4 3 2 1

15. Do you understand what your partner is trying to say, in most matter? 5 4 3 2 1

16. Would you rather talk about intimate matters with your partner than with some other person? 5 4 3 2 1

17. During your relationship, have you talked most things over with your partner? 5 4 3 2 1

18. How often do you initiate stimulating conversation? 5 4 3 2 1

19. Do you withold information from your partner? 5 4 3 2 1

20. Do you verbally agree with what your partner has said? 5 4 3 2 1

21. How often do you suggest a course of action for doing certain things (going out, buying goods, etc.)? 5 4 3 2 1

22. How often do you change the subject of conversation? 5 4 3 2 1

23. Do you give up in those matters which are difficult to discuss? 5 4 3 2 1

24. Do you use humor to lighten a serious discussion or situation? 5 4 3 2 1

25. Do you show concern for your partner's feelings? 5 4 3 2 1

26. How often do you reject your partner's ideas or suggestions? 5 4 3 2 1

27. How often do you interrupt your partner when your partner is trying to make a point? 5 4 3 2 1

28. How often do you pry into or question what your partner is doing? 5 4 3 2 1

29. Do you criticize your partner's judgements? 5 4 3 2 1

30. Do you talk too much--oververbalize? 5 4 3 2 1

31. Do you talk too little--underverbalize? 5 4 3 2 1

32. How often do you express your tender feelings? 5 4 3 2 1

33. Do you know how to stop or alter negative talk when it arrises? 5 4 3 2 1

34. Do you start "lecturing" or demanding when things go wrong? 5 4 3 2 1

35. How often do you express negative thoughts about your daily experiences? 5 4 3 2 1

36. Do you express affection toward your partner? 5 4 3 2 1

37. Do you explain to your partner what "turns you off" or disinterests you sexually? 5 4 3 2 1

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 38. | Do you understand your partner's feelings? | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 39. | Do you listen to what your partner has to say? | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 40. | Do you have a tendency to say things which would be better left unsaid? | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 41. | Do you hesitate to discuss certain subjects with your partner because your are afraid to hurt his/her feelings? | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 42. | Do you find it difficult to ask your partner to engage in sexual activity? | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 43. | Do you understand your partner's sexual needs? | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 44. | Do you make your sexual needs known to your partner? | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 45. | Are you physically affectionate with your partner? | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 46. | Do you discuss your sexual fantasies (imaginations) with your partner? | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 47. | Is it difficult for you to accept suggestions from your partner for changing your sex practices? | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 48. | Do you tell your partner when you have enjoyed a sexual experience? | 5 4 3 2 1 |

## Partner Communication Practice Inventory

Listed below are communication practices that people who live together may use when they interact with each other. In the columns on the right are seven possible responses. Opposite each item, circle the number which best represents the extent to which YOUR PARTNER behaved in the specified way in the last six (6) months.

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1 "NEVER" - or maybe once
2 Rarely - one to three times
3 seldom - four to six times
4 occasionally - seven to ten times
5 Frequently - eleven to twenty times
6 "ALWAYS" - more than twenty times
X uncertain - or do not know

1. How often did your partner talk over pleasant things with you when they occurred? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

2. How often did your partner talk over unpleasant things with you when they occurred? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

3. How often did your partner negotiate with you when disagreements emerged between the two of you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

4. How often did your partner talk about topics in which you were interested? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

5. How often did your partner adjust his/her messages to support the way you seemed to feel at the moment? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

6. How often did your partner avoid embarrassing subjects in the conversations? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

7. How often did your partner criticize your judgments? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

8. How often did your partner explain or express his/her deepest needs to you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

9. How often did your partner <u>effectively</u> discuss things with you before making an important decision? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

10. How often did your partner argue with you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

11. How often did your partner use pleasant words with you which have special meanings not understood by outsiders? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

12. How often did your partner use pleasant nonverbal gestures with you which have special meanings? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

13. How often did your partner sulk or pout (have a silent resentment) when he/she was upset with you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 "NEVER" | - or maybe once | 4 occasionally | - seven to ten times |
| 2 Rarely | - one to three times | 5 Frequently | - eleven to twenty times |
| 3 seldom | - four to six times | 6 "ALWAYS" | - more than twenty times |
| | | X uncertain | - or do not know |

14. How often did your partner use abusive language that upset you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

15. How often did your partner know what you were trying to say? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

16. How often did your partner discuss his/her most sacred beliefs without feelings of restraint or embarrassment? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

17. How often did your partner tell you things which put him/her in a bad light or way? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

18. How often did your partner talk with you when he/she appeared to have personal problems? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

19. How often did your partner talk about his/her intimate matters with you rather than with some other person? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

20. How often did your partner interrupt you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

21. How often did your partner talk with you about your concerns in your relationship? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

22. How often did your partner initiate stimulating conversation? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

23. How often did your partner withhold important information from you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

24. How often did your partner verbally encourage you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

25. How often did your partner suggest a course of action for doing certain things (going out, buying goods, etc.)? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

26. How often did your partner inappropriately change the subject of conversation? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

27. How often did your partner give up in those discussion which were not resolved? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

28. How often did your partner use humor to ease the tension during a serious discussion or situation? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

29. How often did your partner reject your ideas or suggestions? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

30. How often did your partner pry (snoop) into what you were doing? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

31. How often did your partner talk too much? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

32. How often did your partner talk too little? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

33. How often did your partner express tender feelings? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

34. How often did your partner stop negative talk when it occurred? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

35. How often did your partner start "lecturing" (demanding) when things went wrong? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 "NEVER" | - or maybe once | 4 occasionally | - seven to ten times |
| 2 Rarely | - one to three times | 5 Frequently | - eleven to twenty times |
| 3 seldom | - four to six times | 6 "ALWAYS" | - more than twenty times |
| | | X uncertain | - or do not know |

36. How often did your partner express negative thoughts about his/her daily experiences? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

37. How often did your partner express affection toward you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

38. How often did your partner explain to you what "turned him/her on" (interested him/her) sexually? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

39. How often did your partner understand your feelings? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

40. How often did your partner listen to what you had to say? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

41. How often did your partner say things which would be better left unsaid? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

42. How often did your partner hesitate to discuss certain subjects with you because he/she was afraid to hurt your feelings? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

43. How often did your partner ask you to engage in sexual activity? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

44. How often did your partner understand your sexual needs? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

45. How often did your partner communicate with you after sex? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

46. How often did your partner show affectionate by caressing you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

47. How often did your partner discuss his/her sexual interests (concerns) with you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

48. How often did your partner compliment (flatter) you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

49. How often did your partner spontaneously give you a hug or kiss? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

50. How often did your partner tell you when he/she had enjoyed a sexual experience? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree on major decisions, get annoyed about something the other person did, or just have spats or fights because they're in a bad mood or tired or for some other reason. They also use may different ways of trying to settle their differences. Listed below are some things that you and your partner might do when you have a dispute. Please indicate how often YOUR PARTNER did each one of these things.

51. How often did your partner initiate compromise with you when conflicts existed? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

52. How often did your partner say one thing and do something different? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

53. How often did your partner misunderstand what you said? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

54. How often did your partner nag (complain) at you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 "NEVER" | - or maybe once | 4 occasionally | - seven to ten times |
| 2 Rarely | - one to three times | 5 Frequently | - eleven to twenty times |
| 3 seldom | - four to six times | 6 "ALWAYS" | - more than twenty times |
| | | X uncertain | - or do not know |

55. How often did your partner bring up irrelevant problems of the past? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

56. How often did your partner verbally insult you when he/she was angry with you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

57. How often did your partner become physically violent with you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

58. How often did your partner deny that a conflict existed between the two of you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

59. How often did your partner terminate discussion of a conflict before it was resolved? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

60. How often did your partner make abstract generalizations (beat around the bush) as a means of avoiding concrete discussion related to conflicts? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

61. How often did your partner joke around to avoid serious discussion about conflicts? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

62. How often did your partner make contradictory statements about some conflicts? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

63. How often did your partner express "the worst" (or negative thoughts) about conflicts that emerged? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

64. How often did your partner directly criticize you when conflicts emerged between the two of you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

65. How often did your partner express antagonism toward you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

66. How often did your partner use hostile questions that bothered you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

67. How often did your partner deny personal responsibility related to the conflicts? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

68. How often did your partner make demands that specified a change in your behavior in order to resolve a conflict? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

69. How often did your partner use <u>accurate</u> information in discussing events related to the conflicts? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

70. How often did your partner share his/her thoughts, feelings and intentions about conflicts in a nonjudgmental manner? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

71. How often did your partner <u>pleasantly</u> ask for information from you about events related to the conflicts? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

72. How often did your partner express an understanding (or positive regard) for you despite the conflict situation? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 "NEVER" | - or maybe once | 4 occasionally | - seven to ten times |
| 2 Rarely | - one to three times | 5 Frequently | - eleven to twenty times |
| 3 seldom | - four to six times | 6 "ALWAYS" | - more than twenty times |
| | | X uncertain | - or do not know |

73. How often did your partner accept responsibility for conflicts when he/she was involved in the conflict? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

74. How often did your partner initiate problem solving for finding solutions to the conflict? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

75. How often did your partner TRY to discuss the issue calmly? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

76. How often did your partner discuss the issue calmly? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

77. How often did your partner get accurate information to back (support) his/her side of the issues? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

78. How often did your partner bring in or try to bring in someone to help settle things? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

79. How often did your partner argue heatedly but did not yell at you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

80. How often did your partner insult or swear at you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

81. How often did your partner sulk or refused to talk to you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

82. How often did your partner stomp out of the room or house? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

83. How often did your partner cry during conflicts? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

84. How often did your partner do or say something to spite you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

85. How often did your partner threaten to hit or throw something at you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

86. How often did your partner throw or hit or kick something? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

87. How often did your partner throw something at you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

88. How often did your partner push, grab, or shove you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

89. How often did your partner slap you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

90. How often did your partner kick, bite, or hit you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

91. How often did your partner hit or try to hit you with something? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

92. How often did your partner beat (or sexually abuse) you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

93. How often did your partner threaten you with a knife or gun? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

94. How often did your partner use a knife or gun against you? 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

95. How often did your partner do something else that was offensive to you? (please indicate what happened) 1 2 3 4 5 6 X

Below are a series of questions about your relationship with your partner and your family. Please answer each of these questions as honestly and frankly as possible.

Circle the STAGE of your FAMILY DEVELOPMENT:
1 Beginning family (married less than 5 years with no children)
2 Infant child family (oldest child between birth and almost 3 years)
3 Preschool child family (oldest child 3 years to almost 6 years)
4 School age family (oldest child 6 years to almost 14 years)
5 Adolescent family (oldest child 14 years or older)
6 Launching family (oldest child gone to last child leaving home)
7 Postparental family (no children home, and before retirement)
8 Aging family (both partners retired)
9 Childless family (no children after 5 years of marriage)

Circle the STAGE of your RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PARTNER:
1 Just beginning stage
2 Moderately developed stage
3 Well developed stage
4 Highly developed stage
5 Disengaging stage
6 Terminating stage
7 Final separation stage

Circle the number which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship:

| EXTREMELY UNHAPPY | Fairly Unhappy | a little unhappy | moderately happy | very happy | Extremely Happy | PERFECTLY HAPPY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Please indicate which statement best describes how COMMITTED you feel about the future of your relationship:
1 I intensely want our relationship to succeed, and will go to almost any length to see that it does.
2 I want very much for our relationship to succeed, and will do all that I can to see that it does.
3 I want the relationship to continue if my partner will work at improving it.
4 I think it would be nice if our relationship did improve, but I have considered separation or divorce as an alternative.
5 I don't want to continue our relationship unless major changes occur, I refuse to struggle any further.
6 I don't want to continue in this relationship and would rather be fee from it now.

Your sex: 1=male 2=female

How many times have you been legally married?
1=once 2=twice 3=three times 4=four or more times 5=never

How many different people (other than your present partner) have you lived with, (marriage or cohabitation) sharing sexual intimacy for THREE MONTHS of longer BEFORE YOUR relationship with your partner?
1=once 2=two 3=three 4=four 5=five 6=six or more 7=none

# Family Communication Links to Family Therapy

Research Paper for Conference on Family Communication

Sponsored by SCA/Northwestern University

by

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Communication links one family member to another: husband to wife; couple to children; all to families of origin. Communication also links the family to the society and culture around it. Therapy becomes necessary or at least advantageous when communication fails to link one member in meaningful ways to others in the family system. If communication fails over a long period of time, and in a variety of family interactions, the individual can become dysfunctional. Alfred Korzybski once stated that humans talk themselves into trouble and then have to talk themselves out of it. Often therapists serve the useful purpose of helping humans link reality to the unreality they have talked themselves into believing.

Further research in family communication could certainly aid the counselor/therapist. I'd like to suggest some areas in family counseling that further research exploring the communication dynamics going on in families would prove helpful.

The therapy literature contains many generalizations about communication that have not been tested. Much of the advice consists of what some skilled therapist has found successful. Perhaps such "helpful hints to beginning therapists" would have greater value if important communication variables were controlled and measured.

These suggestions for possible research indirectly indicate the connection between family communication issues and family therapy. The Palo Alto School of Therapy, as it has become known, recognizes this connection by focusing upon the importance of communication. Such prominent therapists as G. Bateson, D.D. Jackson, J.H. Weakland, J. Haley, V. Satir, and M. Bowen and S. Minuchin to a lesser extent, base their therapeutic approaches upon using communication techniques.

One area that needs research deals with how communication operates in family conflict. Larry Feldman developed a fascinating model of intimacy and conflict. He observed that repetitive cycles of nonproductive marital conflict caused psychological stress. His model illustrates how couples communicate their need for intimacy and in the process of communicating that need often fail to settle via other communication strategies their basic differences.[1] They may go through conciliatory communication maneuvers because one or both partners can no longer stand the loss of contact-- the loss of intimacy.

This model has twelve different steps that indicate the conflict process an individual goes through in responding to messages received and feedback returned. If in helping couples, or parents and their children, improve their communication, therapists could better distinguish what characterizes what is going on in the process of intrapersonal communication and then interpersonal communication with their partner or children, better suggestions could be made for handling conflict. How does communication differ in the rule governed early stage to the anxiety stage; to the conflict provoking stage, etc.? If therapists knew more about the communica-

tion behaviors in each of these stages, perhaps they could instruct couples on how to recognize and then correct their negative communication before greater stress developed. The model is a fascinating beginning point for studying family conflict and should lend itself to analyses using techniques that M.A. Fitzpatrick, E. Rogers, F. Millar, et al have developed.

Another area that could profit from more communication research is roles. In the last census report (1981), 26.3 million couples, or 62 percent, have become two-income familites. With women working full time in a majority of homes, the traditional role of full time mother/housekeeper has changed. What impact have these changes had on the communication within the family system? How does communication differ in those homes that have a more egalitarian sharing of responsibilities of house care and child care from those that don't? What effects do role modeling have on children and how is this communicated? If counselors knew more about communication in roles, they might give more specific advice, or if nondirective in approach, assist clients in more humanely dealing with role issues/responsibilities.

The father role also needs research on what distinguishes effective communication by a "good" Dad from a "poor" one. Some research shows that fathers are playing not only a more important part in the family system, but their impact is greater than previously thought.[2] Also when marriages fail, an increasing number of fathers receive custody or at least joint custody. This is contrasted by facts that some men fail to become "good Daddys." How does

communication in such families differ from family systems that "produce" effective fathers? Little has been done to study the communication between fathers and sons. Some has been done with mother/daughters but much more could be done there, too.

Family of origin issues often permeate family problems. Some spouses expect to create their own homes as duplicates of their parents'. Such sometimes works when both have similar ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. More often differences lead to chaos or one partner being dominated by the other.[3] Research into the connections between how these expected behaviors via family of origin are communicated by one partner to their spouse and then either accepted or rejected would be interesting. What mediational techniques of communication would be helpful to the therapist to suggest to the couple? Why and how do some family of origin issues get transmitted down through generations and others do not? What communication factors enhance or enrich the best of the family of origin heritage? Perhaps by better specifying communication behaviors, transgenerational affects could be traced.

The influence of the environment on the communication in the family offers another interesting research approach. Recent research debunks the importance of peer influence over adolescents and suggests that how a community defines family, especially adolescence, determines the behavior outcomes.[4] K.G. Terkelsen argues that "present time family structure" is a transgenerational structure derived from the previous generation or generations, and that through socialization the "family structure conforms to that of the

wider society."[5] Some families succeed in hostile non-nurturing environments. Some mothers, especially, and certain of their children, survive in spite of great odds. These "children of steel" become leaders where others, sometimes in the same family, end up in drugs, alcohol, prostitution, and prison eventually. Analyzing and then being able to generalize about the communication from the results of research into these families would especially be helpful to therapists working with the poor in poverty clinics.

Members of families move through different developmental stages. One member's behavior impacts on another and this certainly affects communication. Growth in one member precipitates a developmental change in another, which then influences the first family member, etc. As parents and children move from one developmental stage to another; from courtship to marriage to first child, to eventually "empty nest," communication varies, but no research to date clearly delineates all the communication variables that must change as any family adapts to survive and [redacted] attempts to achieve some cohesion. Rules govern what goes on in families and that might be an appropriate place to investigate communication in these developmental and transitional stages. Susan Shimanoff, Donald Cushman, and W. Barnett Pearce, and Vernon Cronen's research might provide helpful starting points.[6]

These few ideas represent a mere beginning of the research potential in studying family communication. The connections are obvious; therapists use talk/communication to link client's self-image and their role in their family with problems they need help

in solving. Nothing has been said about listening but any successful therapist has to master empathic listening or fail to meet needs of clients. Research into the part listening plays in all aspects of family interaction would be helpful. Carl Rogers, using a non-directive therapeutic approach, stresses the need for therapists to achieve what he calls the quality of giving "unconditional positive regard" to clients in order to help them. Certainly a variety of communication competencies, in addition to careful empathic listening, are involved in achieving this ideal.

Researching the links between communication and family therapy will be difficult. Observing normal families in their normal environments without being intrusive requires considerable skill in managing control variables. The difficulty, however, does not necessitate the need for more studies like David Kantor and William Lehr's research that led to the important book Inside the Family.[7]

FOOTNOTES

[1] Larry E. Feldman, "Marital Conflict and Marital Intimacy: An Integrative Psychodynamic-Behavioral-Systemic Model," Family Process, 12 (1979) 69-78.

[2] K. G. Terkelsen, "Toward a Theory of the Family Life Cycle," in The Family Life Cycle: A Framework of Family Therapy, eds. Elizabeth A. Carter and Monica McGoldrick, New York: Gardner Press, 1980, 33.

[3] Stuart Lieberman, Transgenerational Family Therapy, (London, Croom Helm Ltd., 1979) 13-20.

[4] Francis A. J. Ianni, Home School and Community in Adolescent Education, ERIC, (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University) 1984.

[5] Terkelsen, 30.

[6] Susan B. Shimanoff, Communication Rules: Theory and Research (Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, 1980); Donald B. Cushman, "The Rules Perspective as a Theoretical Basis for the Study of Human Communication," Communication Quarterly 25 (1977), 30-45; W. Barnett Pearce, "Rules Theories of Communication: Varieties, Limitations, and Potentials," (paper presented at SCA, New York City, 1980). See also W. Barnett Pearce and Vernon Croven, Communication Action and Meaning (New York: Praeger, 1980).

[7] San Francisco, Jossey & Bass, 1976.

# COMMUNICATION AND WELL FUNCTIONING FAMILIES

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A family therapist was once asked "How can you do what you do all day? All you deal with is people's dirty laundry." The therapist replied, "Yes, I do have to look at some dirty laundry, but that's not the major part of my job. My job is to get into the linen closet and find what resources each family has in its closet."

As a person interested in communication and family therapy, I too am interested in linen closets. I wish to know more about the resources families have, or might have, to positively affect their functioning. Therefore, I choose to focus this brief paper in the area of communication within well functioning families.

Although work on well functioning families has been carried out over the past two decades the studies have been limited in terms of design, and number and types of subjects. Few studies focused extensively on communication concerns. There is a need for future research which examines communication in well functioning families and which meets the criteria of focus, structure and utility (Gouran, 1979) as they apply to communication research.

Countless aspects of communication in well functioning families could be examined. Let me focus on two which potentially meet the criteria of focus, structure and utility and which fit within a communication purview. These are: (1) well functioning family communication across family forms,

and (2) communication training within prevention programs.

## Well Functioning Family Communication Across Family Forms

In her introduction to Normal Family Processes, Walsh states:

> The need to develop models for family coping competence is especially urgent at the present time of social and economic upheaval in our society. Questions about the breakdown of the family are raised as families are undergoing transformations in structure, functions, and resources. The stress and confusion accompanying these attempts at adaptation make it at once more difficult and more imperative to identify crucial processes that distinguish well-functioning families. (xiii)

Until the last decades, family-oriented research focused on the problematic or dysfunctional system. "Normal" families were used primarily as control groups rather than subjects of study. Only recently has the well functioning family become a scholarly concern. To date, scholars continue to struggle with the identification of well functioning families and ways to study such groups.

The literature documents the development of studies in this area. Hess and Handel's Family Worlds (1959) represented an early systematic attempt to understand the functioning of families without severe medical or psychological symptoms. Few researchers followed their lead until Kantor and Lehr published Inside the Family in 1975, an exhaustive and systematic study of nineteen symptomatic and asymptomatic families based on a wide range of data. In 1976, No Single Thread revealed the attempts of Lewis, Beavers, Gossett and Phillips to distinguish among severely disturbed families, midrange families and healthy families. In 1979, Olson, Sprenkle and Russell published the first of their four articles

describing their "Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems" detailing sixteen types of marital and family systems based on a cohesion/adaptability grid proposing a balanced level of cohesion and adaptability as the most functional. In 1981, Reiss released the results of studies of 200 families and their regulation of inner life in The Family's Construction of Reality. Walsh's collection of essays in Normal Family Processes appeared in 1982 with her conceptions of normality including (1) asymptomatic family functioning, (2) optimal family functioning, (3) average family functioning and (4) transactional family processes. In 1983, Olson, McCubbin and Associates provided insights into over 100 intact families in Families: What Makes Them Work. The concern for understanding well functioning families is growing rapidly.

What does this have to do with us? From a family therapy perspective the historical concentration on psychopathology has limited the valid assumptions of normality. Treatment goals, interventions, diagnostic evaluations were made against non-existent norms. The defecits, not the resources received the lion's share of attention and support. Only now are members of the theraputic community seeking a clearer sense of the mythically normal family. This is a time for reframing - for seeking resources and strengths amidst predictable stresses.

From a communication perspective, the field is ripe for investigation. The examination of communication in well functioning families remains limited in scope and in audience. Although "clear communication," "positive communication skills" " negative communication skills" and similar terms are found in most reports of normal or well functioning families, communi-

cation patterns or concerns receive little in-depth treatment. For example, Olson et. al. list communication as the third core concern, but give it only cursory treatment in terms of definition or description.

Most of the statements about healthy family communication come from therapists reflecting a clinical orientation. For example, based on her theraputic work with functional families, Satir (1972) maintains untroubled and nurturing families demonstrate the following patterns: Self-worth is high; communication is direct, clear, specific, and honest; rules are flexible, human appropriate and subject to change; and the linking to society is open and hopeful. In his discussion of functional and dysfunctional families, Stachowiak (1975) develops four factors in family effectiveness: (1) family productivity or efficiency, (2) leadership patterns, (3) expression of conflict, and (4) clarity of communication.

Empirical research specifically related to family communication has received minimal attention from those outside the communication field. The existing work tends to focus on the marital pair. For example, Raush and his associates' work (1974) on conflict in marriage contributes to our understanding of the patterned nature of marital conflict. Marital research by Gottam and his associates (1977, 1979) contributes further to the distinction between clinic and non-clinic couples. Yet these and other available works do not go far enough.

Most of these writings involve couples and "intact" or natural families. Few focus on the realities of stepfamilies, single parent families, two-career families, etc. The communication patterns of alternative family

forms remain virtually unexplored. The area is ripe for research from a communication perspective.

Until recently most family studies were conducted by persons outside our field. In the past decade communication scholars have turned their attention to marital and family systems generating a significant interest within our field. This interest needs to be channelled in some very basic areas. Let me highlight just a few that I believe need attention.

My counseling internship at an urban mental health clinic serving a large multi-ethnic population taught me to question my assumptions about "normal" family communication patterns. By coincidence, ethnicity and its effect on family functioning has emerged recently as a fruitful area of research and clinical application based on the asumption that ethnic heritage has a bearing on a family's interaction style. (McGoldrick, 1982; McGoldrick, Giordano and Pearce, 1983). Based on her clinical work with ethnic families McGoldrick has identified nine factors which influence the extent to which traditional ethnic patterns will be salient for a particular family and which may be used as a guide for therapists in multi-ethnic settings. Therefore the knowledge of a particular family's ethnic heritage and the communication patterns of that heritage would be of immense value to a family therapist. Sluzki (1982) corroborates this position suggesting that counselors working with families from different ethnic backgrounds are more effective when they have cultural-specific information in addition to that which is family-specific. (1982). Such knowledge would contribute to an understanding of well functioning families of various backgrounds. There is a unique opportunity for persons interested

in family communication and intercultural communication to examine the "normal" family communication patterns of varied ethnic groups.

In addition to the more general area of ethnicity, the family-specific concern of "family-of-origin" provides another fruitful area for research and clinical application. This concern reflects the assumption that the family-of-origin has a bearing on an individual's commmunication patterns in a new system. These asumptions, grounded in therapeutic observation and self-report hold that parental interaction patterns serve as a model for a children's behavior, and eventually for that offspring's behavior in his or her own marital or family circumstance. To date, little systematic effort has been devoted to investigating the relationship between communication behavior in families-of-origin and the current families of that offspring. From my clinical experience such assumptions appear to be validated in numerous cases and provide a powerful tool for analyzing specific family issues. Systematic research could serve to clarify thinking in this area. There is a need for persons interested in transgenerational issues to trace which family-specific communication patterns, if any, are transmitted across generations and the effect of such transmissions, on the creation of new family systems.

We need continued communication-orientation research in typologies (e.g. Fitzpatrick, 1977),in coding relational systems (e.g. Rogers and Farace, 1975), decision-making (Krueger, 1982) and communication style (e.g. Norton, 1983). Scholars in our field have spearheaded this work and it should be extended by others in the field. In addition to this type of research, there is a place for ethnographic and rhetorical studies to complement the more traditional approaches.

A review of the literature indicates communication scholars need exposure. A check of the references in the major books detailing normal family functioning reveals little or no reference to the scholarship in our field. The work of communicaiton scholars interested in family concerns, many of whom are involved in this conference, remains relatively unknown outside of our field. Our task, therefore, is twofold: (1) to generate well conceived collaborative examinations of communication within various forms of normal families and, (2) to gain access to additional means of dissemination to assure the utility of our research.

## Communication Training Within Prevention Programs

Most of us drawn to straddle the fence between communication and therapy find ourselves concerned with the role of communication instruction in the prevention or early treatment of family disfunction. Although prevention approaches may be viewed on a continum, I find myself more closely identified with the end which involves education/training. L'Abate describes three levels of prevention ranging from involving functional couples in skills training programs, to dealing with "at risk" families using skill training and therapeutic approaches, to providing direct therapeutic interventions for seriously troubled families. (1981). Clearly the first two areas involve communication training. Yet, although I and others in our field are involved in such work, we need a greater understanding of the process.

Research on marriage enrichment programs is still in its infancy when viewed within the context of the large number of couples who have participated in the different programs. Hof and Miller (1981) contend that this scarcity in research is due, in part, to the difficulty of evaluating

the effectiveness of marital enrichment programs. Gurman and Kniskern (1977) summarized 29 studies which purported to examine the impact of marriage enrichment programs. Although positive results were found in a majority of the measures, most studies used self-report measures and administered the questionnaires or interviews immediately after the program. Thus, few real changes in behavior or long-range effects could be documented.

Recently, Wampler (1982) summarized nineteen research studies on the Minnesota Couple Communication Project, the most highly researched of these programs, and reported the program appears to produce immediate positive changes in communication behavior and relationship satisfaction with improvement in the areas maintained after the immediate impact of the program had passed.

After her qualitative study of Marriage Enrichment couples, Ellis (1982) reported that people talked more freely about their feelings to spouses and even to other persons. Former participants were able to express negative feelings more constructively. Yet, some couples reported that although they were emotionally expressive during the weekend, they could not sustain this later. Although there have been assessments and criticisms of such programs our information is limited. (Doherty and Lester, 1982, Doherty, McCabe, and Ryder, 1978 and Fitzpatrick, 1982). Garland suggests that without establishing strong roots in research and program evaluation the growth in marriage enrichment services cannot continue. (1983).

Persons involved in prevention need to know more about the effect of such programs. Those of us involved in communication-oriented programs

need a greater understanding of communication needs, and of the effects of communication training, across family forms. Although we all tend to give positive and negative values to particular communication skills (e.g. Olson, McCubbin et. al., 1983) we do not know enough about the value of particular communication skills across family forms and developmental stages. Eventually, we need to link communication skills and relationship definitions. (Montgomery, 1981). Finally, researchers need to examine family oriented prevention programs in addition to the marital-oriented programs. The logical and utilitarian outcome of such research would be the development of highly effective communication-oriented preventive programs designed for various family forms. The need for such programs is great.

Communication scholars have much to offer to the process of understanding communication patterns in well functioning families and to the improvement of communication skills within families. Such research has great value and utility. On a less generic and esoteric level, all I really want to know is: (What are normal communication patterns for an Irish-American-Korean family at the school-age children stage? (2) How might such a family acquire perfect communication skills? That's not too much to ask, is it?

Postcript

Since this paper attempts to serve as a stimulus, I would like to share my growing intuitive sense that the rhetorical tradition has potential applications to family communication concerns. Lately, I find myself activating pieces of a distant rhetorical graduate education as I watch families interact. Rhetorical approaches to understanding families and

family therapy remain relatively unexplored. Theorists such as Laing (1969), Kantor and Lehr (1976) and Reiss (1981) provide significant links between the behavioral and symbolic ways of viewing families. their examinations of issues such as images, metaphors, and shared constrcs, open doors to rhetorical exploration. There is potential for applying Burke's dramatic pented, god and devil terms, and "moments" of human drama, to understanding families. (Sterns, 1984). For example even a listing of the "moments," including negative, hierarchy, guilt, mortification, victimage, cathaisis and redemption indicates their potential connections to the family therapy process.

Recently, rhetorical critics have emphasized narrative as a paradigm for examining communication's role forming the human experience. Examination of family narratives from rhetorical perspectives may shed new light on understanding the transgenerational families, within the rhetoric of social movements the examination of a "culture" or sequent of a whole has uncovered much about the whole. Since longitudinal family research is difficult at best, some methodology from social movements may compliment studies such as that by Olson, McCubbin who claim their findings represent "snapshots of intact families." (35). Such speculation may lead to new ways of "seeing" families.

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# COMMUNICATION AND THE PRACTICE OF PREVENTION

SCA/Northwestern University Conference
on Family Communication Research
Sept. 6-8, 1984
Evanston, Illinois

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# COMMUNICATION AND THE PRACTICE OF PREVENTION

Communication and therapy occupy varying points of the same continuum. Both deal with the symbolic, using language as the medium of exchange. Communication remains the primary tool of all therapeutic technique, and effective therapy inevitably improves communication in the client family system. Formally and informally, therapy is judged by how much change in communication occurs in the system. Communication both maintains and heals pain, dysfunctional symptoms and problems in the family. A year ago I completed a one-year Clinical Psychology internship at a youth and family services community mental health center. The year and my previous study of Clinical Psychology was, for me, devoted to puzzling over exactly the issues raised in this conference about the connection between family communication and family therapy. This paper gives me the opportunity to explore what I now view the appropriate and urgently needed expanded role of communication scholars might be in relationship with the therapeutic enterprise. I will urge involvement in the emerging profession of prevention of family dysfunction, suggest research directions to support prevention activities, and finally discuss practical considerations of these issues.

## Communication and Family Wellness

Communication professionals are ideally suited to take leadership in the emerging field of family wellness or prevention of dysfunction and problems.

As a nation, our priorities for spending time and energy are skewed toward fixing instead of preventing. The Surgeon General reported in 1979 that "...half of U. S. mortality in 1979 was due to unhealthy behavior or lifestyles" while, according to a major life insurance company representative, only 4% of health care costs are spent for prevention (p. 16, Mace, 1983). Even closer to home for communication scholars, Albee reports that the annual budget of the National Institute of Mental Health allocates no more than 2% to prevention (p. 17, Mace, 1983). According to many insiders, mental health workers regard teaching and prevention activities at the bottom of the prestige ladder. The APA recently expanded the required role of experimental psychology in approved Ph. D. programs in Clinical Psychology, effectively reducing to almost zero the options available to students outside the study of psychology. Counselling programs do a little better, but many counselling students take no communication courses. The same is true of M.S.W. students nationwide. In my own clinical program, not one course on training or prevention was offered. At the large, well respected training center where I later interned, no primary prevention programs were offered even with a professional staff of over fifty mental health personnel. Prevention is seen as less glamorous than therapy, as requiring a lower degree of training, and is regarded as fuzzy and poorly researched, in spite of the great hope of the sixties that prevention would gradually replace therapy for most child and family problems. That hope of the Great Society and New Frontier has died a financially strangled death.

Three levels of prevention activities are found in the literature on prevention. Primary prevention refers to the efforts of various levels of teachers and trainers, including lay and volunteer personnel, to enable

the family to avoid trouble later that might prove damaging. Most enrichment and family and couple communication programs fall under this category (Galvin and Brommel, 1982). Classes in the college and high school curriculum on parenting and family life, church sponsored pre-marital programs, and sex abuse programs in the schools qualify as primary prevention. Psychologists and psychiatrists are almost never involved in primary prevention unless they undertake such activities as a volunteer outside their regular professional work. Secondary prevention programs are oriented toward families and couples at risk, e. g. troubled marriages at risk for divorce, underachieving or acting-out children (L'Abate, 1981). This type of prevention requires careful targeting of specific populations or individuals who might best use the experience of the program. This is a borderline area in which some skill training and information-giving might overlap with therapy. Tertiary prevention is the therapist's (usually) response to a family's relational crisis, requiring session-by-session flexible response to the needs of the family instead of implementation of a pre-planned program. Often this kind of prevention of further damage results from referral from friends or institutional representatives such as teachers, probation officers, juvenile court referees or social workers.[1] Communication professionals belong at the primary and secondary end of the prevention continuum, a professional space unoccupied by many traditional mental health workers.

Furthering the dearth of interest in primary prevention is the damning fact that with a few exceptions, third-level intervention is the

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[1]See Mace, 1983, Gordon, 1977, Jacobson, 1980, L'Abate 1981 and 1983 for further discussion of prevention and arguments for its need.

only kind of intervention paid for by federal, state and county funding sources. As funds shrink, administrators are forced to attend to the needs of persons who would be hospitalized without outpatient facilities, with early-release patients from state hospitals, abuse victims, drug and alcohol abusers and their families, and severely emotionally disturbed children and adolescents for whom fewer residential placements exist each year. In sum, many recognize the desirability of primary prevention, but are unable to provide more than a token amount. They must provide crisis oriented services first.

Communication researchers and trainers are often educated in ways that provide a foundation for leadership and provision of service in all areas of prevention. We are already associated in the professional community with wellness and normality rather than with the pathology model. We understand and further knowledge about interactive family systems. We hold to the idea that teaching and writing are honorable activities, eschewing the drama of saving the suicidal teenager unless we have recently watched Ordinary People or other "therapist as savior" films. Communication studies enable us to provide families with information, courses, modeling of productive communication, coaching and encouragement for solving everyday and expected life-cycle conflicts.

The public needs help with learning to live peacefully with each other. Perhaps we need a Communicators for Social Responsibility chapter; if we cannot teach families how to solve problems without violence and craziness, who can? Families are the crux of learning about collaboration, shared interest problem solving and negotiating without threat.

Research in Training and Prevention

Several research directions could advance prevention activities for families. First, we need more careful, descriptive studies of healthy or normal families. Walsh's excellent (1982) collection of research studies on normal families gives an overview of many of the areas needing further research, such as definitions of normality itself, normal families over time, models of normal family functioning, families at risk, the life cycle, issues relating to divorced families, cultural and ethnic differences, sex roles, networking and other family issues. Pitifully few descriptions of normal couples and families exist; those that do primarily completed by researchers at this conference. We know very little about the everyday, long-term functioning of normal families[2]. Qualitative studies, particularly, hold promise for description of different normal patterns of family interaction. Some of the most popular couple training programs need updating according to recent research on what real-life normal couples and families do.

New directions in methodology could be added to the graduate curriculum and thus to our journals. Single subject experimental designs, in particular (Kazdin, 1980; Bornstein et al.; 1981; Hocker, 1984,)are underused in communication research. For the sake of accountability and program planning, administrators, teachers and trainers must know which programs work, delivered in what manner, to which population, at which time. Some couple communication programs, especially the (Minnesota) Couple

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[2]See Riskin, 1982 for a thorough overview of research with normal families.

Communication Program, are well researched. Treatment-outcome research is a staple of behavioral marital therapy (BMT), exemplified by the work of Jacobson and Margolin among others, but specific outcome designs are little used in communication except in between groups statistical experiments and in communication apprehension. Single subject experimental designs, which provide for the couple or family serving as their own control, allow assessment of the program based on baseline data collected over time before the program. During this time the family completes all the measures but does not receive the training program. The design requires few cases, but the multiple data collection points and variety of assessment devices give rich information about what is likely to be responsible for the change in the communication of the couple or family. A rule of thumb in BMT research is that each experiment should include a variety of self, other and observer reports, including devices which observe the behavior targeted for change. If one can demonstrate that the training results in change in a predicted direction, after observing no change during the baseline data collection period, one can assess whether the training or nonspecific effects are most likely responsible for communication change. Many couples improve simply by coming to the research lab, filling out measures, and expecting to be trained in communication. I've threatened to stop doing communication training and take families backpacking in the Montana mountains to increase their satisfaction with the relationships; single subject designs could help sort out the multiple influence, or nonspecific effects problems. Despite the practicality of this design for communication research and its

growing acceptance by journals in psychology, the methodology appears to rarely be covered in graduate research seminars in communication nor do such studies appear in our journals.

Communication and therapy researchers can learn from each others' areas of expertise. We know less about patterns which are likely to lead to severe dysfunction, therapists know less about normality. We recently completed three team projects at my university in such a shared manner, testing whether self-help communication manuals, combined with visits to a research lab for video taping and measurement collection, over a twelve-week period, could improve the communication of satisfied and distressed married couples and living-together couples (Bornstein, et al., 1983a & 1983b; Hocker, 1984). Besides learning a lot about how couples use and do not use self-help materials, we challenged each others' assumptions about what makes for better communication, what is teachable, and priorities for such training. The collaboration was uncomfortable and exciting. Might I add a plea to you here for an interactional communication coding scheme which covers many different areas of interchange, that could take the place of the MICS and other widely used, but non-interactive, BMT communication coding schemes?

One example of needed outcome research which would benefit from cross-disciplinary collaboration is research in marital preparation programs (Olson, 1983). Most present research assesses attitudes and relationship satisfaction, but not observed communication interactions pre and post training. Another fruitful context for joint research is the mental

health center. Most are understaffed but pressed by funding sources for a bewildering array of descriptive outcome data. Most of the data collected is of low quality and wastes the time of the clinician assigned to its collection and organization. Research is often assigned to clerical technicians or students. Thesis and dissertation projects potentially abound.

Practical Considerations

Consulting is fast becoming a field of its own (Gallesich, 1982; Stewart, 1984). Many of us here act as consultants, and students from our graduate programs are hired as consultants upon graduation. Prevention of couple and family dysfunction, enrichment programs, creation of new and testing of existing programs can serve as a base for consulting services. I will suggest in this final section some ways in which our programs might enhance such a new field. I propose that we teach, at the graduate level, courses on education and training of couples, families and professionals in the field who work with families. A considerable body of material already exists in the area. In addition to courses on family systems theory and family communication, we need courses on research and application in these areas. Secondly, we can work as a professional team member, on an as-needed basis, with others who work with families, such as therapists, youth court personnel, ministers, juvenile court referees and judges, and counselors in the schools. This kind of work is usually termed case management, a concept gaining currency in the mental health world. Take the example of a teenager from a single-parent family who has been labelled as ungovernable by the parent and the schools after repeated runaways. Prior to a court hearing, as

many as eight or ten family members and professionals might gather in one room (or more likely, in the corridor of the court building) to argue about the proper dispensation of the case. As one of the therapists assigned to the family, I often find myself acting more as a group leader or mediator than as a therapist, since each individual present usually has his or her own idea about what should happen to the teenager and the rest of the family. Someone has to coordinate the helpers, usually all under stress and overworked and under threat from the court to come up with an appropriate solution to the family's problem. This function could be served well by people trained in conflict management and other communication skills, and could save the court and the agencies a lot of phone calls and money.

A third way in which communication experts might consult with mental health providers is in the role of a guest consultant, in the room with the family or behind the one-way mirror. This role is usually taken by supervisors or fellow therapists, who are likely to focus more on therapeutic interventions than on rich descriptions of the client family's communication patterns. Additionally, many therapists will acknowledge that they don't know what to look for beyond simple non-verbal gestures, listening styles, or expression of emotions. Complex communication patterns, their recognition and potential change may be used by the superstar therapist-trainers such as Madanes, Haley and Minuchin, but are out of the expertise area of many therapists. Several clinics I am familiar with use outsiders to conduct teaching and training of their staff in conjunction with such in vivo consultation and observation.

A more familiar prevention role for communication professors is that of

the inservice training provider. The focus of such workshops can be on how to implement and test primary prevention programs. Secondary prevention activities might include teaching therapists how to focus on desired communication in parenting classes, adolescent groups, children of divorce groups, abuse victim groups and other such targeted populations. Many times people in these groups have been referred or mandated to attend by the court. The comprehensive treatment plan filed with the court or the hospital includes many specific communication changes desired, such as "learn to initiate appropriate female relationships" or "learn nondestructive ways to control anger under stress." Often therapists focus on psychological information or general emotional support rather than specific communication training activities. Communication experts can help tailor-make group treatment plans to the communication needs of families in trouble. Some areas, such as assertiveness training, are widely understood by therapists; others, such as negotiation, expressiveness, competence, and non-defensiveness are rarely included in groups.

Another fruitful context for communication training is foster families. Most state agencies provide training for foster parents in parenting, discipline, behavior management and recognition of impending crises such as suicidal behavior. Much more assistance is needed by these unsung heroes and heroines of our society. They need help with teaching the children who come and go about affiliation, friendships, conflict management, anger control, and sexual communication, to name only a few areas they face daily.

Most premarital training programs are privided by church organizations. (Olson, 1983). Many times groups of churches are eager to provide more communication training activities to pre and newly married couples, but need assistance in training lay volunteers and clergy to give such help. A Diocese in Oregon, for instance, used my services last year to help them set up a self-led family support system, including family communication training and retreats.

Finally, one of the most visible new consulting fields is divorce mediation, and mediation with previously divorced couples. Mediation is not counselling, and relies heavily on communication facilitation skills for its success (Folberg & Taylor, 1984; Hocker.and Wilmot, 1985). Mediation provides a structure in which couples can make their own decisions about continued responsibilities to their children and equitable distribution of property. In some states, custody mediation is mandatory, and is usually provided by counselors or attorneys, who may not be specifically trained in mediation. This is a field whose time has come; we miss a great professional and service opportunity if we do not encourage our students to take mediation training and provide these services. Outcome research is limited at present, usually focusing on number of re-visits to the court and the satisfaction of the former couple with the settlement and the process. Still to be developed are screening tools using samples of communication behavior, and research in the productive communication of both mediator and couple. Donohue has begun such a program; there may be others of which I am unaware.

Many more examples of prevention activities could be listed, but these will suffice. Communication professionals could lead the field of

prevention of family dusfunction. We are already involved in training and prevention in our applied couple and family courses: I am urging we augmentthese activities outside the classroom to benefit families and to fill in the other end of the continuum occupied by therapists. We can be a large part of research and leadership in understanding how families can collaboratively and happily live their lives together.

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# FAMILY THERAPY ORIENTATIONS TO COMMUNICATION AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION

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Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Conference on Family Communication, Northwestern University, September, 1984.

# FAMILY THERAPY ORIENTATIONS TO COMMUNICATION AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION

## INTRODUCTION

The literature in the family therapy field reflects the extent of creative energy currently directed toward conceptualizations of families and their problems. The diversification in orientations to family therapy represented in the various schools has, in fact, lead to an increasing advocacy in the family literature for synthesis and integration in what has been labeled an eclectic field (Olson, et al, 1980; Duhl, et al, 1979).

A wide variety of clinical models and strategies for working with families is, consequently, available to family therapists. These range from aprroaches which take a psychodynamic orientation to the family, focusing on family interaction patterns as an outcome of the unconscious internalizations and unfinished business of the parents (Ackerman, 1966; Meissner, 1978), to models which emphasize how families maintain a problem through the communication patterns they use to resolve the problem (Haley, 1976), to experiential models with their foucus on the importance of communication skills and the expression of feelings in the therapeutic setting (Satir, 1964; Kempler, 1973).

Several excellent reviews have begun the process of distinguishing among and integrating the various schools (Hoffman, 1981; Madanes, 1981; Walsh, 1982). Each of these models makes some assumptions about the goals of therapy for the family (e.g., awareness and understanding vs. problem-solving), the role of the therapist (e.g., interpreter vs. change agent), and the locus of control in the therapeutic setting (e.g., the family as ultimately responsible for itself vs. the therapist as responsible for creating change in the system).

Attempts to integrate models emphasize that most all of the current clinical models used to treat families function within the general framework of a systems orientation to the family. Walsh (1982) describes family systems theory "as a general framework underlying major clinical approaches to the family." (Note: In spite of the thinking and writing about families and communication theory which systems theory has fostered, the fact that widely divergent approaches to viewing families can be conceived of as operating within a systems framework may suggest something about the limitations of this theory as an integrating tool.)

Each of these models can be discussed as operating within a systems perspective because of some basic orientations to the family as a social unit which each assume. There is an emphasis on the interdependence of family members to one another. In a general sense, when one family member hurts, all family members hurt. There is also a concern for how family members tend to evoke behaviors in each other--what happens in the family is conceived of as an interactive phenomenon. In addition, family behavior is viewed as repetitive; that is families are seen a developing (functional or dysfunctional) patterns of interacting. The patterns are governed by rules which function to maintain stability (or homeostasis) of the family. These rules are subject to change as the family evoles, but sometimes rules that develop as a way of keeping the system stable become the problem and the family gets "stuck" in a painful pattern. Finally, the communication value of behavior in the family assumes primary importance. Henry (1973) has made the point that even "the peeling of an onion" has communication significance in the context of a relationship. Bochner (1976), in his review of communication in families, describes communication as "the most fundamental aspect of family process," a view congruent with a wide array of system approaches to family.

There are significant differences in the way various clinical models of family therapy view communication, however. Identifying primary orientations toward communication among those who are concerned with the practice of family therapy may be useful for those of us who are interested in the family as a context for the study of communication. A description of alternative approaches to communication as represented in the family therapy literature can provide a framework for identifying potential areas for research and theory development.

## FAMILY THERAPY APRROACHES TOWARD COMMUNICATION

The following review is an attempt to identify major orientations toward communication in the family therapy literature. It is not meant to be a comprehensive review but is, instead, intended to offer a sense of the available alternative perspectives toward communication as reflected in the diverse famiy therapy literature. For each of the perspectives that are identified, potential issues relevant to research and pedagogy in family communiction have been suggested. No perspective is viewed as necessarily mutually exclusive of another. No effort, either, is made to claim that all significant research in family communication can be subsummed under one of the perspectives which have been identified. Finally, no attempt has been made to make the categories parallel in any way. Categories have been identified from the literature as reflective of views of communication as represented by various schools or programs of research in family therapy. Five orientations toward communication have been identified in the family therapy literature :

1. the skills approach,
2. the pragmatic or strategic approach,
3. the structural apporach,
4. the family typology approach, and
5. the insight approach.

THE SKILLS APPROACH. Olson, Russell, and Sprenkle (1983),in their circumplex model of marital and family systems, identify three dimensions of family behavior: cohesion, adaptability and communiction. They describe communication, however, as a "facilitating dimension" and discuss communication in terms of positive and negative skills which either enhance or hinder the ability of couples and families "to share with each other their changing needs and preferences as they relate to cohesion and adaptability" or "minimize the ability of a couple or family members to share their feelings and, thereby, restrict their movement on these dimensions." Examples of the behaviors identified under the communication dimension of the model include those skills generally identified with communication competency--empathy, relfective listening, supportive communication, etc. It is this notion of communication as a "facilitating dimension" in family relationships that characterizes the skills approach.

Satir (1964,1972) is, perhaps, the best know proponent of a skills orientation to communication. She stresses the importance of specific communication behaviors that tend to facilitate family growth. Communication which is direct, clear, and honest is viewed as most facilitative of healthy family functioning.

Programs oriented toward marital enrichment and growth through the development of increased competence in communication are reflective of this skills orientation toward communication. Of these, the Minnesota Couples Communication Program is perhaps the most widely known and researched (Miller, Nunnally, and Wackman, 1976). Behavioral and social exchange models of family therapy tend also to view communication as a set of behavior skills which can be learned and developed to improve the couple's or the family's awareness of mutual expectations and needs (Patterson et. al., 1975; Sager, 1976).

The limitation of this approach is that orientations to communication that focus on effective skills or techniques tend to oversimplify the complex process of communication. Fisher (1978) deals with this issue in his discussion of the concept of communicative effectiveness. This does not mean that a skills orientation toward communication is not useful, but focusing on skills does short-circuit the fact that messages have multiple meanings and function on different levels in families. The skills approach tends to avoid treating communication as a complex phenomenon.

There are advantages to the skills approach to communication, however. The skills approach may be more immediately responsive to the practical needs of students and

professionals and their effects can be assessed objectively. There is some evidence that skills training among couples, for instance, has short-term positive effects on satisfaction in relationships, although long-term effects are more limited (Wampler, 1982). Areas for potential research and study suggested by the skills approach to communication tend to focus on the nature and effects of communication competence in families:

1. What communication competencies or skills can be empirically validated as related to satisfaction in marriages in families?

2. What competencies or skills can be identified as distinguishing normal families from dysfunctional families? We must first identify normal family functioning. Walsh (1982) has begun this process in her synthesis of the research that concludes with a profile of normal family functioning.

3. What effect, if any, do skills training courses, programs, and workshops have on couples and families? Some work has begun in this area (Wampler, 1982; Fitzpatrick, 1982), but more needs to be done before results are conclusive.

4. How can the skills and competencies associated with optimum family functioning be taught or researched without oversimplifying the communication process? (Maybe there is no answer to this question.)

THE PRAGMATIC OR STRATEGIC APPROACH. The strategic approach to family therapy is represented by Haley (1976), Madanes (1981), Watzlawick and the Palo Alto group (Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch, 1974), and the Milan team (Selvini Palazzoli, et al, 1978). Strategic family therapists take the view that the therapist's primary responsibility is to plan a strategy for solving the client's problem. Problems are described in general terms as emerging from the difficulties families have in moving from one developmental (or life cycle) stage to another (Haley, 1976). Usually the patterns of communication that the family has developed to deal with their developmental crisis create problems themselves. As Walsh (1982) writes, "the therapeutic focus is on how families maintain a problem by precisely the means they are using to handle the problem."

Strategic therapists take the pragmatic view of communication, focusing on the complex relationship-defining nature of communication. As a relationship-defining process, communication operates at different levels and can best be understood as a sequence of rule-governed acts between people. Communication that, for instance, may be open and empathic on the level of individual skills ("I can see that you are depressed") also carries information on a relationship level ("I'll take care of you").

Because the strategic therapist's focus of conern is with

understanding and changing the rules and patterns in the family, the emphasis is on the function that the communicative act performs rather than on the extent to which it can be identified in any objective sense, as effective or ineffective. Strategic therapists stress the complex nature of communication which carries meanings at different levels and attend to contradictions and paradoxes that emerge from the complexity of the process. Therapists themselves often prescribe paradoxical solutions to family problems that may incorporate behaviors contrary to generally accepted competency skills.

Watzlawick and Coyne (1980) offer an example of the application of paradox to therapeutic situations in their work with a depressed father and his family. Direct attempts in the family to help the depressed father recover from a stroke only made him more dependent. His dependency and depression, in turn, activated a cycle in which the family tried even harder to get him out of his despair. The father was put in a paradoxical situation where, in attempting to initiate at other family members' request, he would be demonstrating compliance and dependence. When, with the help of the therapists, the family began to do less and to focus on the other family member's inadequacies the father began to take the intitiative, setting up a cycle where he took greater charge of himself. Supportive, empathic, and encouraging messages toward the father tended to inhibit the father's ability to "take charge". At the relationship level, encouraging messages validated his lack of ability to initate for himself. The father could only free himself from dependency on his family when his improvement was due to his own efforts and was not based on a submissive response to the demands of his family.

The use of paradox and paradoxical injunctions is one way in which the strategic therapist focuses on the complexity of the communication process. Messages have metaphorical content for family members, define relationships in the family, and serve functions for family members that may be contradictory and paradoxical. Strategic family therapists provide a view of communication that empahsizes the importance of looking at communication patterns, sequences of acts as they occur in a context, and multiple meanings rather than as a set of skills that either facilitate or inhibit family interaction.

The work of the Rogers-Millar team (Rogers and Farace, 1975) in developing a methodology for analyzing communication control in relationships emerges from the same pragmatic approach to communication assumed by strategic family therapists.

Harris (1980) in her work has taken the concept of paradox as it is discussed by Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967) and intergrated it with the theory of the Coordinated Management of Meaning developed by Cronen and Pearce (1982) to show how paradox is characticistic of so-called healthy families. Her methodology relies on case study analysis to take apart the comunication logic operating at different levels in the system and to analyze

the contractions that often exist, for instance, between assumptions and rules that individuals make for themselves and others in a relationship and the assumptions and rules that they make for the relationship.

Potential areas for research in family communication suggested by this school of family therapy include a diverse range of interests and concerns. Some questions which may be suggestive of further directions are:

1. How do families change and move in and out of communication patterns?

2. What is the nature of paradox and contradiction in family communication ?

3. How can the concept of communicaton as a complex process be integrated with the skills approach to communication?

4. How can we study the communication patterns of entire family groups, in addition to those of dyadic units in the family?

THE STRUCTURAL APPROACH. Minuchin (1974) and his colleagues have developed an approach to family therapy that focuses on family organization in the functioning of the family unit. The structural model empahsizes the importance of hierarchy and differentiation among individuals in family functioning. The importance of clear lines of authority between parents and children and of clear boundaries between individuals and subgroups is stressed. Attention is focused on coalitions across parent-child generations that tend to undermine the parents' role in the hierarchy and on coalitions that may inhibit the independency and autonomy of children.

Families are described as operating on a continuum, with enmeshed families characterized by unclear boundaries where a sense of belonging interferes with individual autonomy, and disenaged families characterized by rigid boundaries and a lack of mutual caring among family members.

Structural famiy therapists focus on the organizing function of communication and on the role of communication in regulating authority and distance in the family. The concept of the distance-regulating function of communication is also explored by Kantor and Lehr (1975) and by Hess and Handel (1959) who have each developed models of family interaction based on how families manage their need to simultaneously live together as a family and provide for the individuation of the members. The issue of how families manage their separateness and connectedness is a primary theme in the family systems literature.

Structural family therapists attend to the ways in which communication patterns in a family reflect the family's hierarchical structure, relate to networks and coalitions among

subgroups, clarify or make rigid boundaries among subsystems, and provide for individuality and closeness among members. The focus, as with the strategic family therapist, is on relationship patterns in comunication. The primary concern, however, is with the effectiveness of communication in maintaining a balance between clear lines of authority and repression and between emotional detachment and too much accomodation.

Similar to the strategic family therapist, the structural family therapist, is concerned with how the family manages tasks at particular stages of development (e.g., a young adult child's leaving home). Functional and dysfuntional commununication are viewed as important and identified on the basis of how the family's interaction patterns, as they relate to organizational issues in the family, help or impede the family's adaptation to its developmental requirements. Structural orientations toward communication provide a fertile yet relatively unresearched area for research and study by those interested in family communication. Potential areas include:

1. How are coalitions and networks in the family regulated and maintanined by communication?

2. How are boundaries defined, clarified, confused, and/or changed by the family's communication?

3. What communication behaviors differentiate hierarchical structures in families that are clear and flexible from those that are confused and rigid?

4. How might the relationship between the family's communication patterns and their management of developmental tasks be investigated?

THE FAMILY TYPOLOGY APPROACH. For Haley (1980) and the strategic famiy therapists it is more useful to focus on families in relationship to how they manage particular developmental tasks in the life cycle than it is to analyze family behavior from the perspective of a specific typology. Typologies are viewed by some family therapists, however, as useful models for identifying the dimensions along which families differ in their functioning.

Typologies attempt to distinguish among families and relationships according to how families manage important aspects of family and how they organize their reality. The search for patterns in family interaction has led those interested in family typology to methods that attempt to identify basic ways in which families can be differentied.

Olson, et. al. (1983) has developed a circumplex model of families that identifies sixteen family types depending upon how the family has oriented itself toward cohesion and adaptability. Kantor and Lehr's (1975) typology is based on the family's distance-regulating behaviors and identifies families as either open, closed, or random depending upon how the family uses the

resources of space, time, and energy to get at target dimensions of affect, power, and meaning. Reiss (1981) has spent considerable time and research effort in developing a typology that analyzes the family's problem-solving strategies. His model focuses on the extent to which the family is invested in achieving agreement and repressing differences among members or upon an open search for resources and confirmation outside the family. Reiss has labeled each of these categories "consensus-sensitive," "interpersonal distance-sensitive", and "environment-sensitive."

Typology approaches to the famiy focus on communication behaviors as defining characteristics of various types of family systems and family relationships. Fitzpatrick's (1977) work in developing a typology of couple relationships is, perhaps, the most widely known work in family communication that has attempted to distinguish relationship types among couples.

Some potentially productive areas for research that takes a typological approach to communication might explore some of the following questions:

1. How do communication styles differ among families who are oriented differently to various dimensions of family functioning?

2. What communication patterns and/or communication styles can be identified as associated with specific family types?

3. To what extent can the typological approach be used to integrate theory about family communication?

4. What differences exist among families with different communication styles in their ability to cope with stress and adapt to change?

THE INSIGHT APPROACH. The term "insight" is admittedly inadequate as a label for this approach. It is intended to describe a group of therapists who do attach importance to communication in families and, yet, whose approach to communication is somewhat atheoretical. Henry (1973) and Whitaker (Napier and Whitaker, 1978) are therapists who have been associated with this approach.

The insight approach tends to be skeptical of theory because of the belief that it short-circuits the uniqueness and immediacy of the therapeutic situation (Whitaker, 1976). There is an emphasis on the need for intensive studies of families or for extended case studies that can reveal how families manage the central themes, key issues, or existential dilemmas of their lives. Henry's (1973) study of five families each with an autistic child has been called a "veritable dictionary of communication" (Bochner, 1976). Napier and Whitaker (1978) stress the importance and difficulty that families have in achieving a

sense of being an integrated whole while, at the same time, satisfying the needs and providing for the growth of each of its members. Importance is also attached to attempting to understand how the family experiences themselves as a collective unit.

In his discussion of "The Hindrance of Theory in Clinical Work," Whitaker (1976) describes the therapeutic process as essentially an existential situation in which the therapist must somehow help the family to see that "just as his life is inexplicable to him, their life must be inexplicable to them, but it is nonetheless something they must make decisions with, for, and about." In this process, Whitaker emphasizes the importance of the communication of feelings and, while he pays special attention to helping the family come to terms with their dilemmas, he does assign considerable importance to communication skills as facilitative in this process.

The work of Askham (1976) is grounded in symbolic interaction theory and, yet, it explores one of the basic existential problems of the marriage relationship. In her description of the tension that exists between identity and stability in the marriage relationship, Askham examines a central dilemma of married couples. In Askham's model, the individuals are attracted to stable relationships because of the opportunity to develop a sense of personal identity through conversations with a significant other. At the same time, the stability of the relaitonship may be threatened by activities related to the pursuit of personal identities. In outlining some of the major conditions required as partners seek both identity and stability in the relationship, Askham (1976) illustrates the potential for contradiction in the management of these needs, supporting her theory with case studies.

The insight approach relies heavily on the examination of how families talk about their relationships as an important source of information for understanding the coping strategies of families. Rubin's (1976) classic study of working class couples is a good example of the extent to which interviews and dialogues from families themselves can be used to provide a picture of the central struggles and schisms that ofter confront people in relationships.

Consistent with this approach has been Krueger's (1983) study of communication strategies and patterns in the dual career couple. The insight approach focuses on communication as a vehicle for working through some of the major concerns of contempory family life. Some potential areas for research in family communication suggested by this approach include:

1. What are some of the major dilemmas of family life and family relationships? How do these emerge and how are they managed through communication?

2. What are some of the major themes and issues that emerge as families interact with each other?

3. To what extent are particular communication patterns unique to specific family forms? What, for instance, is unique about the communication patterns of dual-career families, step-families, co-habitating couples, or empty-nested families?

4. How do couples and families talk about their experience of being in a marriage or family? How do families, for instance, see themselves managing basic issues of power, intimacy, change, and growth through their communication? What discrepancies exist between what they say and what observers see?

CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made in this discussion to identify basic approaches to communication assumed by several predominant schools of family therapy. Each of these represents a view of communication that varies according to: (1) how the communication process is conceived (e.g., facilitative vs. metaphorical and relation-defining ), (2) the unit of analysis under study (e.g., specific behavioral skills vs. sequential patterns of interaction), (3) the importance attached to communication content (e.g., emphasis on the relationship or command aspect of communication vs. interest in communication as reflective of the family's struggle with existential themes and dilemmas inherent in contemporary families), and (4) the favored method of investigating and accumulating knowledge about families (e.g., empirical coding and analyis of transactions vs. case studies or phenomenological analysis). It is hoped that differentiation among approaches to communication in the family therapy literature can, not only identify potential areas of research in family communication, but can be a stimulus for distinguishing among perspectives toward family communication and provide us with a way to organize and integrate research and study in the area.

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